

ANC

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

THE OLD FLAME
by
James T. Farrell
author of
STUDS LONIGAN

PLUS —
FRANK KANE
RICHARD DEMING
JACK WEBB
EVAN HUNTER
— and others

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MANHUNT VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3, MAY, 1954. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. Telephone MU 7-6623. Application for second class entry is pending at the Post Office, New York, New York. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1954 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

She asked him up to her room. She was beautiful. Sam looked at his own ugly mug in the mirror, and he couldn't figure it at all.

**BY RICHARD
DEMING**



The Blonde in the Bar

AFTER ten years as a vice-squad cop, I not only know every place in St. Louis where professional hustlers hang out, I also know all the bars where amateurs go looking

for men. The *Jefferson* is neither sort of place.

It was a little surprising in that sedate atmosphere to have a lovely blonde slide onto the bar stool next to me and throw an inviting smile in my direction before turning her attention to the bartender. It was even more surprising when after that unmistakably inviting smile, she concentrated on ordering a drink and ignored my curious examination of her.

After a moment I decided she must have momentarily mistaken me for someone else. Wishful thinking, I told myself. Now I was beginning to imagine beautiful blondes were passing at me. Ruefully I turned from the girl to examine my reflection in the bar mirror.

Look at you, I told myself. Thirty-two, and you look forty. Why would any woman pass at *you*?

Dispassionately I studied the lines of disillusionment deeply etched into my face, physical evidence of the spiritual scars I had accumulated during ten years of constant association with the seamy side of life. Why did the muck a cop encountered leave scars on some and roll off the backs of others without leaving a trace, I wondered? Why was I a misanthrope at thirty-two while my partner, Jud Harrison, remained as cheerfully full of high spirits after ten years on the vice squad as he had been as a rookie?

My gaze flicked from my own reflection to that of the girl next

to me, meeting her eyes in the mirror. To my surprise her lips curled in a slight smile.

"Admiring yourself?" she asked softly.

I turned from her reflection to the girl herself. She was about twenty-five, I guessed, and as sleek and beautiful as a new Cadillac. From her dress and the diamond brooch at her throat I judged she was equally expensive too.

If she was on the make, why had she picked me, I wondered? On the other side of her sat a smoothly handsome man whose perfectly tailored Palm Beach made my shapeless seersucker suit look like a sack. And dotted along the bar were a half dozen other men who were not only better looking than I, but obviously had more money.

Deciding not to look a gift horse in the mouth, I said, "Criticizing myself. I was trying to make up my mind whether to drink myself to death, or just go home and cut my throat."

The girl moved her eyes sidewise at me. "Come on now. It can't be that bad."

Producing a package of cigarettes, I offered her one, but she shook her head.

"Buy you a drink?"

With the same slight smile she had thrown to me in the mirror she indicated the still nearly full highball before her. Running out of conversational subjects, I lapsed into silence.

"We can talk though," the girl said. "I'm not a bad listener. Why so down in the mouth? Fight with your wife?"

I shook my head. "I don't own one. It's nothing specific. I guess I'm usually down in the mouth."

"Business troubles?"

I considered. "Maybe you could call it that. Not financial troubles. I'm a cop. Every once in a while I get disgusted with humanity and more disgusted with myself."

She looked up at me interestedly. "A policeman? I might have guessed that."

When I raised an eyebrow inquiringly, she said, "You look so strong. And you seem to have that quiet air of authority policemen are supposed to have."

The girl actually sounded like she admired me, I thought with mild surprise. For a moment I felt a tug of suspicion, but when I studied her guileless face it died away and was replaced by an unaccustomed feeling of expansiveness. I have never been much of a ladies' man, and it gave me a strangely pleasant feeling to find I could impress a woman as beautiful as this one.

She was no casual barfly, throwing out a line to the first man she encountered in an attempt to make a pickup, I decided. With her looks and her obviously expensive dress, she could get all the men she wanted without cruising the bars. I decided she must be a guest at the hotel, and was merely being friendly.

Noticing her glass was now nearly empty, I asked, "Can I buy you a drink now?"

"All right," she said agreeably.

Her name was Jacqueline Crosby, she told me over the drink, and she was a dress designer from Chicago. She was in town for two weeks as her company's representative at the national fashion show. In return I informed her my name was Sam Card and I was a sergeant on the St. Louis morality squad.

By two highballs later we were old friends. Usually alcohol only succeeds in making me more morose, but to my surprise I found that drinking with Jacqueline was making me increasingly cheerful. By eleven o'clock, when she suggested that she had better get to bed because she had to rise early, I was behaving as light-heartedly as though I were my moon-faced partner, Jud Harrison, instead of the morality squad's eternal sourpuss.

"I live right here at the hotel," she added. "If you want to take me up to my room, I'll mix you a nightcap in return for the drinks you bought me."

Her tone conveyed the barest suggestion of promise that the invitation could mean more than a nightcap. Momentarily it brought my feet back to earth as I again wondered what motive so beautiful a woman could have in scraping acquaintance with a mere cop. Then I decided that questioning motives was probably one of the reasons I

had missed many of the pleasures in life, and rose to follow her without a care in the world.

Jacqueline had a suite, not just a room, I discovered when she keyed open her door and I followed her into a large sitting room. She left me there while she went on into the bedroom, and I could hear her phoning down for ice.

Then she called, "Get the door when the boy brings ice, will you, Sam? I want to change into something more comfortable."

That did it. Up till then my opinion of Jacqueline had been swaying back and forth between regarding her merely as an impersonally friendly female and a woman on the make. But the corny line about getting into something more comfortable crystallized it. I was now suddenly sure that from the moment she sat down on the bar stool next to me, she had intended me to bring her to her suite and make love to her.

With a mixture of mounting anticipation and puzzlement I wondered if after a lifetime of being ignored by women, I had suddenly become irresistible. Walking over to a wall mirror, I studied my face again, but it didn't look any more like the answer to a maiden's prayers than it had in the bar mirror downstairs.

A knock came at the door, I opened it and traded the white-coated boy in the hall a quarter for a bowl of ice. I had barely closed the door behind him when Jacqueline came from the bedroom.

More comfortable, she had said, and she had changed into about as comfortable a garment as you can imagine short of bare skin. She wore a lace negligee so filmy it was all but transparent. And beneath it there was nothing but the pink and white of her flesh. She wore nothing else.

She was even barefoot.

I watched in astonishment as she removed a bottle, siphon and two glasses from a small liquor cabinet and mixed two highballs. If there had been any lingering doubts in my mind as to what she wanted of me, that negligee would have halted them.

But why so lovely a woman would have picked me out of all the men in the Jefferson bar, I could not imagine.

The thought occurred to me that perhaps I was intended to be the victim of a badger game, but I instantly discarded it as inconceivable the girl would be stupid enough to attempt that stunt on a man she knew to be a cop.

When she neared to within two feet of me in order to hand me my drink, and the bright light of the lamp next to me penetrated her thin garment to expose her firm pink-tipped breasts as clearly as though she were naked, I stopped worrying about her motives. Setting down my glass on the mantel without tasting it, I removed hers from her hand, set it next to mine, and took hold of her.

Approximately an hour later I discovered the reason for Jacqueline's concentrated play for me. We were back in the sitting room by then, and I had dumped the tepid contents of our highball glasses and mixed two fresh drinks. Jacqueline sat on the sofa watching me mix them, her bare feet tucked up under her and the flimsy negligee wrapped around her so tightly it outlined her figure like a coating of cellophane.

When I passed over her drink, she patted the place next to her on the sofa in indication for me to sit down. I shook my head and looked at her without smiling.

"Why?" I asked.

"Why what, Sam?"

"Why everything? Why did you bring me up here? What do you want?"

Her smooth forehead puckered in a frown. "You mean you think there's an angle?"

"I don't think I'm irresistible," I told her. "For thirty-two years women hardly give me a second glance. Then the most beautiful woman I ever saw takes one look at me and goes completely overboard. Forgive my cynicism, but I'm not exactly a dunce. There has to be an angle."

"Maybe you're just being modest."

"All right," I said. "I'm irresistible."

I drained my drink in one swallow and set down the empty glass.

"I'll phone you tomorrow," I said, and started toward the door.

"Wait, Sam!"

When I stopped and turned, she said softly, "Aren't you even going to kiss me goodnight?"

"Sure. After you tell me the angle."

She sighed. "You make it very difficult, Sam. You make me feel like . . . like some kind of prostitute. Like I'm trading myself for a favor. And it isn't that way at all. I could have just asked the favor without ever leaving the bar."

"Now we're getting somewhere," I said.

My voice sounded weary in my own ears. One more scar to add to my collection. Even though I had known it all along, hearing her admit it was not solely my personal attraction which made her throw herself at me did something to my ego. I suddenly experienced the vaguely unclean feeling I imagine a man gets when he hands a pro her fee.

Then the explanation spilled out of her in a rush, as though she wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible.

"I knew who you were before I sat next to you downstairs," she said. "I've been trying to get in touch with you since yesterday. Only I didn't want to contact you at headquarters. I had a friend with a connection downtown get me your home address, and I talked to your

landlady on the phone. She told me you frequently spent off-duty time at the *Jefferson* bar, so today I checked in here to watch for you. I had been staying at the *Statler*, you see. I had a waiter point you out, and then I deliberately struck up an acquaintance."

When she paused to get her breath, I asked, "Why?"

"The day before yesterday you arrested a girl named Minnie Joy for soliciting. At least, that's the name she's booked under. It isn't her real name."

"What is her real name?"

"Minerva Crosby," Jacqueline said in a low voice. "She's my older sister."

I looked at her in astonishment. "Your sister is a hustler?"

She blushed clear down to her shoulders. "She ran away ten years ago," she said breathlessly. "Our parents are dead and she couldn't get along with the uncle who raised us. My uncle didn't know it, but I've been corresponding with her ever since she ran away. She used to write me that she was a model, and it wasn't until I came to St. Louis for this fashion show and looked her up that I discovered what she really was. And then before I could do anything about it, you arrested her. I want to help her, Sam. I want to take her back to Chicago with me and get her a decent job. But first I want to get her out of this jam."

For a long while I merely regarded her curiously. Then I asked, "How?"

"Her case is set for the day after tomorrow. You'll have to testify as the arresting officer. Couldn't you say . . . I mean couldn't you somehow fix it . . . ?"

When her voice trailed off, I said dryly, "You mean give false evidence?"

"Well, it isn't as though Min were a bad girl," she said defensively. "She just hasn't had the breaks."

"This is her third tumble," I said in the same dry voice. "There's lots of work available for women her age these days, and there isn't a reason in the world she has to make her living the way she does. I'm sorry she's your sister, but she's a chronic and hopeless delinquent."

"I can pay you," she said eagerly.

Jumping from the sofa, she crossed to where she had thrown her purse onto a chair, unclasped it and withdrew a roll as thick as my wrist.

"I'm willing to give you five hundred dollars to get Min off," she said, peeling fifty-dollar bills off the roll as she advanced on me. "Here."

She attempted to thrust them into my hand. The negligee she had forgotten about, and it hung wide open. Not that it made much difference, since it failed to conceal anything anyway.

A little roughly, I pushed her away. "Look, baby, if you want to help your sister, don't go around trying to bribe cops. Show up in court and tell the judge your plans for rehabilitation. Maybe he'll parole her to your custody."

"Oh, I couldn't. It would ruin me in the fashion field if anyone discovered my sister was a . . . was a . . . that kind of woman. Please take the money."

In a definite tone I said, "I'm not a smart cop, Jacqueline, and maybe I'm not such a hot lover, but I've got one attribute I intend to hang onto. I'm an honest cop. I don't take bribes and I wouldn't lie in court to save my own mother from the gas chamber. Let's drop the subject."

She stood looking up at me, the bunched mass of fifties in one hand and the rest of the roll in the other. Her breasts rose and fell with her strained breathing.

"Now I'll kiss you goodnight," I said.

Without touching her with my hands, I leaned forward and planted a paternal kiss on her forehead. She was still standing there motionless when I slammed the door behind me.

Minnie Joy's case wasn't scheduled until the day after, but the next morning I had to be in police court to testify in another case. My partner, Jud Harrison, had a case that morning too, so after I finished my own business, I waited for him.

Jud was not only my partner, but my best friend. We were rookies together, made plain-clothes at the same time and worked together right on down the line. I don't make friends easily; in fact, I know I have a reputation in the department as a kind of hard guy to get along with.

But Jud and I were buddies. We made a strange combination: I'm rather morose and withdrawn and Jud's as jolly as a department-store Santa Claus, but perhaps the reason we hit it off so well was that we complemented each other. We were as close as brothers.

Jud's case was a second offender booked under the name of Jean Darling. Rather boredly I listened to his testimony that the woman had approached him at the corner of Sixth and Locust and asked if he was interested in a little fun, whereupon he had arrested her for soliciting. She was represented by an attorney, and with only half my attention I was conscious that the lawyer was cross-examining Jud.

My attention perked up when Jud's moonlike face grew embarrassed as he admitted the woman had not asked for money. He started to explain that he had jumped the gun before she could ask because he recognized her as a previous offender, but the defense lawyer cut him off. Brusquely the judge dismissed the charge for lack of evidence.

As we crossed the street together from the Municipal Courts Building to headquarters, I said, "How come an old hand like you loused up a case? You might have known that one wouldn't stand up."

"Just a bad day, I guess," he muttered, still slightly red in the face.

But a moment later he was his

usual breezy self. "What you got planned for tonight, Gloomy? Anything special?"

"No. Why?"

"Let's do a little celebrating. Dinner at the Statler, a few drinks and a couple of floor shows."

"Two days before pay day? You must be nuts."

"On me, I mean," he said. "It's an invitation, Sad-eyes."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "Your rich uncle die?"

"I hit a horse," he said jubilantly.

Producing his wallet, he opened it to show me a stack of bills.

"Fifty on the nose at ten to one," he chortled. "Five hundred solid iron men."

3

When we checked in at room 404, where the morality squad hangs out, Lieutenant Boxer told us he had a character in the showup room he wanted us to look at.

The man he wanted us to look over was a lank, sallow-faced individual of about forty, clad in a perfectly tailored gabardine suit which must have cost him as much as I earn in a month. From the lighted front of the room he peered out at his shadowy audience with an expression of amused contempt on his face.

"Who is he?" I asked.

Lieutenant Boxer said in a quiet voice, "Monk Cartelli."

"The Chicago hood?" Jud and I

asked in surprised chorus. Then, by himself, Jud inquired uneasily, "What's he doing in town?"

"We've got a stoolie tip that the syndicate is trying to muscle in on St. Louis, and Monk is the advance man," the lieutenant said. "The chief ordered him brought in for everybody to look over so we can stop him cold before he starts. We can't hold him on anything because he hasn't yet done anything we know about, and the chief doesn't want to order him out of town because he's afraid the syndicate would just substitute some other organizer we don't know. He wants him turned loose, then hemmed in so closely he can't make a move we don't know about. He thinks if we can convince the syndicate it's hopeless, they'll give St. Louis up as a bad job."

I said, "I get around, and I haven't heard any whispers of syndicate activity."

"They're not beating a brass drum," Lieutenant Boxer told me. "Apparently it's a very quiet operation. Our stoolie tip says they're just feeling around to start, sounding out sentiment among local racketeers, seeing how a few picked political candidates respond to offers of campaign contributions, maybe trying to buy a few cops here and there just to see if St. Louis cops can be bought. Incidentally, that's one of the things the chief wants every man on the force to watch for. Any strangers who feel you out to see if you're willing to do some minor

favor for a fee, play along until you get the whole pitch, then let me know at once. We're not at all sure how this bunch operates, so be on your toes for anything at all out of the way. And report it the minute you get it."

"Yes, sir," we both said.

Later, as both Jud and I sat at our desks catching up on reports, the lieutenant's words kept going through my mind. "Be on your toes for anything at all out of the way," he had said. Jacqueline Crosby's offer of five hundred dollars to change my testimony against her sister was certainly out of the way, but I could hardly reconcile it with syndicate operations.

It had not even occurred to me to report her offer as a bribe attempt. Ordinarily if I were offered a bribe, I wouldn't even bother to refuse it. I would simply drop my arm on the briber's shoulder, march him off to headquarters and enter a charge of attempted bribery. But Jacqueline's offer came under rather peculiar circumstances. I incline to interpret the law rather rigidly, but even to my mind it would be sticking a little too close to the letter of the law to haul in a woman on a bribery charge because in an hysterical moment she went overboard to get her sister out of a jam.

Then too, I would have had to be a little less than human to arrest Jacqueline for offering me money to fix a minor charge only minutes after she had been in my arms.

But the more I thought about it, the more clearly it dawned on me that Jacqueline Crosby had gone about offering her bribe in the only way that was absolutely safe for her if the bribe was refused. I wondered if she had deliberately planned it that way, knowing that no cop, regardless of how strict a sense of duty he had, would take any more drastic action than turning her down after the intimate hour we had spent together.

Abruptly I shoved aside my reports, muttered something unintelligible to Jud's question as to where I was going, and went up the hall to room 406.

The card on Minnie Joy gave her birth date as 1920 and the place of birth as Blytheville, Arkansas. That proved nothing, of course, as the data would have been taken from Minnie herself, and she might have lied for any number of reasons. On the other hand, criminals who change their names seldom bother to fake such statistics as place of birth. If Jacqueline Crosby was from Chicago, as she said, it was still possible that she had an older sister born in Blytheville, Arkansas, but I began to worry about it a little.

There was no indication on the card that Minnie Joy was an alias, but again that meant nothing. Few prostitutes went under their own names.

Actually there was nothing in the record which tended to substantiate the blonde Jacqueline's claim that

Minnie Joy was her older sister, but there was nothing there to disprove the claim either.

I studied Minnie's picture, summoned up a mental image of the woman herself, and decided there was no family resemblance between the two women at all.

I went back to room 404 and had a confidential talk with Lieutenant Boxer. When the head of the morality squad had heard my story and my interpretation of what the story meant, he took me up to the fifth floor for a private session with the chief.

The chief listened without interruption until I had finished.

Then he said, "You think this woman may have been a syndicate plant, eh, Card? I don't quite get it. Why all the elaborate preliminaries? If they just wanted to sound you out to discover whether you'd be susceptible to bribes when they got ready to go into operation, why couldn't she just have hinted around at the bar without dragging you off to her room? I can't quite see your theory that she wanted to create a situation where it wouldn't occur to you to arrest her. The way you describe it, she finally made the offer, baldly laying it on the line and even trying to thrust the money into your hand, she laid herself wide open to a bribery charge in case you weren't as chivalrous as she hoped. She could have hinted around at the bar just enough to find out how you stood without actually making

it definite enough to get herself in trouble."

That hadn't occurred to me, which is probably why I'm a sergeant instead of chief of police.

Rather foolishly I said, "I don't know, sir."

"Think you could still take her up on her offer without rousing her suspicion?" he asked.

"I could try."

"What is this case she wanted you to fix?"

"Solicitation. An old pro. This is her third fall."

"Probably sixty days, eh? Ninety at the most. Well, she's going to get a break. Go along with this Crosby woman all the way. Accept the money and change your testimony in court just enough to get the charge dismissed. Can you do that without making it obvious?"

"Sure, Chief."

"Then we'll sit back and see what happens. If the woman is actually what she claims, there's no particular harm done. Maybe she can rehabilitate her sister, and we'll figure out some way to return her five hundred dollars. But if she's working with the syndicate, you ought to hear from her again. Keep Lieutenant Boxer informed of developments. All right. That's all, Sergeant."

I left with Lieutenant Boxer.

When we got back to room 404 Jud Harrison watched curiously as I called the *Jefferson* and asked for Miss Jacqueline Crosby's suite.

When he raised an eyebrow at me, I merely shook my head.

After a moment Jacqueline answered, but she didn't sound very enthusiastic when she discovered who was calling.

"Any chance of seeing you again?" I asked.

Her laugh was a trifle brittle. "After the way we parted? I don't believe so, Sergeant."

"Last night it was Sam," I said. "I've been thinking things over, and maybe we can get together on that deal after all."

She said cautiously, "What made you change your mind?"

"Last night I was sore," I said. "I wasn't even thinking about the deal. All I could think of was that I thought I was making a big conquest, then all of a sudden you told me the whole thing happened because you wanted a favor, I guess my ego was hurt. Today I'm over the hurt."

"I see." There was a lengthy silence as she thought things over. Finally she said in a more friendly voice, "When do you want to see me, Sam?"

By the wall clock I saw it was only eleven-thirty. "How about before lunch? I'm only a couple of blocks from there. I'll stop by now if it's O.K."

"I'll be waiting," she said softly.

When I hung up, Jud said, "We going somewhere?"

"Yeah," I said. "We can grab some lunch after I make this stop,

then make our rounds instead of coming back to the office."

4.

Jacqueline was wearing a red hostess gown this time. Though it was not transparent, in its own way it was just as revealing as last night's negligee. It was cut low enough to expose the cleft between her round breasts, and the upper part fitted like a coat of paint down to below her hips. From there on down it flared outward in multiple pleats, which effectively concealed her lovely legs.

She met me at the door with a kiss, then leaned backward to look up into my face, which movement simultaneously happened to thrust forward the zipper clasp between her breasts so that I couldn't fail to see it. The zipper, I noted, ran clear down the front of her gown to her ankles, but I managed to resist the obvious invitation.

"My partner's waiting for me downstairs," I said. "I can't stay."

She looked a little disappointed.

"About your sister," I suggested.

"Minnie Joy? Will you really help her, Sam?"

I said I would do what I could. She was across to her purse and had that thick roll in her hands again almost before I got the words out.

Just to see what would happen, I said, "You don't have to pay me, Jacqueline. I want to do it just for you."

"No, Sam. It's worth it to me. And you will be taking a risk, won't you? I mean giving false testimony. You ought to have something for that. Take this five hundred. I can afford it."

I let her stuff the money in my pocket.

"I'll call you," I said. "Not tonight, because I've got a date with my partner to celebrate a fast horse. Maybe tomorrow."

"I'm not sure I'll be free," she said dubiously. "There are so many evening events connected with this fashion show. Better wait until I can call you at work."

At the door she gave me a passionate goodby kiss.

When I rejoined Jud in the hotel lobby, he asked, "What's the pitch, Sam? Don't tell me some chippie is trying to operate out of an exclusive joint like this."

"Hardly," I told him. "I was just making a personal call. Blonde I met last night."

"I met a blonde night before last," he said reminiscently. "Wait till you meet her. She'll make that gloomy face of yours light up like a neon sign."

The rest of that day was routine. We followed up a couple of tips on new houses that were supposed to be trying to open up, but drew blanks on both investigations. Late in the afternoon we cruised the bars along Sixth Street, Jud taking one side of the street and I taking the other. In one a girl of about

sixteen made a pass at me, but she wasn't a professional. Apparently she was just a kid looking for a little excitement, and after scaring the pants off her with a lecture, I let her go. Fortunately for the bar, she had only been drinking Coke, so all the barkeep got was a few harsh words about letting minors hang around his place.

Jud didn't run into anything.

"We've got a pretty clean town for a city our size," Jud remarked as we checked in at 404 just before going off duty. "I'd hate to see the syndicate get a hand hold on St. Louis and do to it what they've done to some other places."

I told him to wait for me while I had a conference with Lieutenant Boxer. From across the room he watched curiously as I handed the lieutenant the money I had received from Jacqueline and gave him a brief report of what had happened.

When I joined Jud again, he asked, "What's all this secret business between you and the head?"

"A little undercover work I'm doing," I said. "I'll tell you about it later."

But the opportunity never came up. Jud took me to the *Statler* for dinner, on the way to the dining room stopping at the desk and asking to speak to a Miss Maurine Hahn. He looked both disappointed and puzzled when the clerk informed him the woman had checked out the day before without leaving a forwarding address.

"Your blonde?" I asked.

"Yeah." He gave a small shrug.

"Well, I guess she isn't the only blonde in the world."

Then we ran into a man from the circuit attorney's office Jud knew, and with his usual exuberance Jud talked him into joining our party. After dinner we hit a couple of clubs, Jud insisting on picking up all the checks because of his lucky horse hit, and by the time the bars closed at one-thirty we had added a reporter friend of Jud's and two stray brunettes the reporter knew. Alone I can cruise from bar to bar all night without having anyone but an occasional hustler so much as speak to me, but when Jud celebrates he always accumulates a retinue before the evening is over.

In the general confusion I never did get around to telling him what I had been doing for Lieutenant Boxer.

The next morning in police court I put on my little act for Minnie Joy. Since she had no defense attorney, I spoke to the judge before trial and told him that for reasons of policy connected with another case, the morality squad wanted to quash the charge against Minnie.

"Lieutenant Boxer approve this?" he wanted to know.

"It's his idea."

"All right," he said, and dismissed the case.

Minnie was so surprised, an attendant had to start her toward the door before she realized she

was free. Apparently she had no inkling of Jacqueline's efforts on her behalf.

That evening, disregarding the blonde Jacqueline's instructions to wait until I heard from her, I phoned the *Jefferson*.

Miss Jacqueline Crosby had checked out without leaving a forwarding address, the desk informed me.

Two days later she phoned me at headquarters.

"What happened to you?" I asked.

"A friend loaned me an apartment," she said, "so I moved from the hotel. Thanks for what you did for Minnie."

"Don't mention it. You made it worthwhile."

"Busy tonight?"

"No."

She reeled off an address on Lindell just west of Grand Avenue. "Apartment 3-C. Come about eight and we'll spend a quiet evening at home."

Her soft voice was so loaded with promise, I very nearly decided to play it straight and forget reporting this development to the head of the morality squad. But after ten years of practice, it's a little difficult to go against routine. Dutifully I went over to Lieutenant Boxer's desk and told him about the phone call.

His eyes narrowed when I mentioned the address. "Interesting," he said. "You knew the chief was having Monk Cartelli covered, didn't you?"

"You mentioned he intended to."

"Well, for your information, the address for your date with your beautiful blonde is the same apartment where Cartelli is holed up."

In a way this made me even more eager to keep the date, but not for the same reason. It effectively killed any romantic aspirations I had developed because of the promise in Jacqueline's tone.

I suppose the normal thing for a man to do who has an assignation with a lovely blonde is to adjust his necktie a final time just before he rings the doorbell. Instead I loosened my Detective Special in its holster.

Jacqueline opened the door. For a change she was attired merely in an ordinary dress, and not a particularly sexy one at that. She didn't offer to kiss me either. However, she gave me an intimate smile as she held the door wide for me to enter.

I wasn't particularly surprised to find three other men in the room, but I managed to simulate surprise. I looked from Monk Cartelli, who stood with his back to an artificial fireplace, to the two mugs who sat side by side on the sofa. Both were strangers to me, one long and thin and the other squat and chunky, but they had two things in common. Each had the deadpan expression of the professional killer.

The other thing they had in common was the .45 caliber automatic each leveled at my belt buckle. "What's the gag?" I asked Jacqueline.

"No gag," Monk Cartelli smoothly answered for her. "Don't let the guns worry you. They're just insurance that you stay quiet until you hear what I have to say. We won't even inconvenience you by disarming you, Sergeant. Just back against the wall there and keep your arms at your sides."

With my eyes on the nonchalantly-held .45's, I did as ordered. Then we waited nearly ten minutes in complete silence. Once, when I started to ask what we were waiting for, Monk silenced me with an imperious gesture. All this time the two hoods watched me unblinkingly, and Jacqueline sat with her hands quietly folded in her lap, apparently perfectly at ease, though her gaze avoided mine.

Finally the door buzzer sounded. Jacqueline rose, went to the door and ushered in my partner, Jud Harrison.

5.

Just as I had, Jud gaped at the other occupants of the apartment in surprise, but his surprise seemed genuine. A sick feeling grew inside of me as I realized something that I suppose, in a way, I'd known unconsciously all along — that Jud's five hundred dollars had not come from a horse bet.

"Is this your Maurine Hahn from the *Staller*?" I asked him cynically, nodding at Jacqueline.

His eyes flicked at the blonde,

then back to me. "Yeah. What the devil you doing here, Sam?"

"The same thing you are, sucker. Only the name she gave me was Jacqueline Crosby and her supposed sister's name was Minnie Joy. I suppose she told you that other hustler you got off in court the other day was her sister."

Cartelli broke up further conversation by ordering Jud to stand against the wall next to me.

"I don't want any violence, gentlemen," he said. "As soon as you've listened to a couple of recordings and heard what I have to say, I'll order my men to put up their guns. By that time I think you will have sufficiently come around to my point of view so that they won't be necessary. Meantime I prefer to prevent argument by keeping you under control."

Crossing to a small table containing a phonograph, Cartelli switched the machine on.

For a few seconds there was only a dull scratching sound, then what was unmistakably my voice said, "About your sister."

"Minnie Joy?" Jacqueline's voice said. "Will you really help her, Sam?"

Relentlessly the record continued to reel off the conversation which had taken place between me and the blonde in her hotel suite until it reached the point where Jacqueline said, "No, Sam. It's worth it to me. And you will be taking a risk, won't you? I mean giving false

testimony. You ought to have something for that. Take this five hundred. I can afford it."

Then Cartelli shut it off. Replacing the record with another, he turned on the machine again. This one played an almost identical scene, except that Jud's voice was substituted for mine and the case the blonde was bribing him to fix involved a woman named Jean Darling instead of Minnie Joy.

When Monk Cartelli shut off the second record, there was a long silence in the room.

I broke it by asking without emotion, "How many other cops have you suckered into this deal?"

"No cops," the syndicate organizer said smugly. "We netted a young assistant in the circuit attorney's office, though, plus a young fellow in the coroner's office. We aren't rushing things. We're just lining up a few people at a time."

Next to me Jud said worriedly, "What is this deal, Sam?"

"We've been set up," I told him in a cold voice. "I guess we both thought we were making an easy and safe five hundred. But it was a trap. Those records mailed to the police commissioner not only would get us bounced off the force, they'd land us in jail. The chief thought the syndicate might be feeling around to see who'd be susceptible to bribery, but apparently plans were a little more definite than that. Cartelli here is lining up cops and other officials in strategic spots who

will *have* to take orders from the syndicate. We're hooked, Jud. We might as well face it."

Jud's face was sweating. "Listen," he said, "just because I agreed to get this blonde's sister off the hook for a fee doesn't mean I'm willing to play along with the syndicate."

"Rather go to jail?" Cartelli asked idly.

Jud stared at him. The bitterness grew in me almost unbearably when I saw his face begin to go to pieces.

"What do you want of us?" I asked Cartelli harshly.

"Just your unquestioning future cooperation. For which you'll be paid more than you ever earned before."

"Why us?" I demanded. "We're just a couple of unimportant cops. Why didn't you pick on a few division heads?"

"We plan on both you men being division heads before we're through, Sergeant. We're just beginning to organize. When we have helped into office the officials we want, we'll be in a position to dictate appointments and promotions in the police department. We plan long in advance, and we may not reach that point for several years. But when we do, we want men we know will cooperate. Both of you have everything to gain by being picked by the syndicate. A few years from now one of you will head the morality squad and the other will probably head one of the other squads. And what we pay you on the side will

make your salaries look like peanuts."

Jud's expression gradually grew calmer as the syndicate organizer spoke. When Cartelli stopped, Jud looked at me questioningly, and the mixture of thoughtfulness and cupidity in his eyes made me even sicker than his panic a while before.

"You might as well tell your men to put their guns up," I told Cartelli wearily.

Monk looked from me to Jud in an estimating way, then nodded to the two hoods, who obediently thrust their guns under their arms.

"I guess we'll have to go along, won't we, Sam?" Jud asked. "I mean, we haven't much choice, have we?"

"You haven't," I told him. "But I happen to be a plant. The department knows all about the bribe I took."

As I spoke I flashed my hand to my hip and came up with a cocked Detective Special.

"You're all under arrest," I said in a brittle voice.

Jud gaped at me. "You . . . you're a department plant, Sam? But . . . but how about me?"

"You should have thought of that before you took a bribe, Jud," I said gently. "Get their guns."

"Listen," he said. "You're not going to turn *me* in, are you?"

"You took an oath when you became a cop," I told him. "The minute you violated that oath, you stopped being my friend and became

a crooked cop. I'm sorry, Jud, but you're going in too."

His hand stole toward his hip.

"Hold it," I advised him, shifting my gun in his direction.

With my attention momentarily on Jud, the two hoods decided to make a break. As their hands streaked toward their armpits, I started to swing back toward them.

Jud's shoulder caught me in the hip and sent me sprawling.

All hell broke loose.

Both gunmen's .45's roared simultaneously and plaster spewed from the wall. I took my time with two shots and knocked the squat man back to the couch with my first. The second caught the taller gunman in the forehead and he dropped like a stone.

Monk Cartelli had crouched behind an overstuffed chair, and now a shot crashed from that direction. Jud, still on his feet, slammed back against the wall, slid to the floor and from a seated position sent five slugs at the chair. Cartelli jerked erect and pitched over on his back.

Slowly I climbed to my feet and surveyed the damage.

Both gunmen and Cartelli were dead. The blonde cowered in a corner, unharmed but green with fright. Ordering her to stay there, I looked at Jud.

He had taken Cartelli's single

shot squarely in the chest. He was done and he knew it. Even as I watched, blood began to dribble from the corner of his mouth.

"Sam," he whispered. "I'm sorry, Sam." Then with an effort, "The record . . ."

Crossing to the phonograph, I lifted the record which proved my partner a dishonest cop, broke it in my hands into a dozen pieces and tossed the pieces out the third-floor window into the street.

"You can go out clean, Jud," I said.

He was dead before I finished the sentence.

To the blonde I said harshly, "One charge of bribery is enough to take care of you. Would you like to mention my partner Jud to anybody, and get yourself an extra year?"

She shook her head, her eyes wide and terrified.

Then she said, "Sam, you liked me a lot that — that other night. Can't you — isn't there some way you can give me a break?"

I looked at her for a long minute before replying. "Sure, babe, sure," I said finally. "I can give you a break. I'll take you down to the can just the way you are, instead of stopping first to kick your teeth down your throat." Then I pushed her away from me and went to the phone.





Murder of a Mouse

JUSTICE is blind, it's said, and so is vanity. This is the story of a man who learned it for himself.

His name was Charles Bruce, and early in the morning he got out of bed and padded into the bathroom. Even barefooted in pajamas he gave, somehow, the effect of almost frightening arrogance and vanity. His overdeveloped ego was apparent in the set of his polished blond head that was hardly tousled after a sleepless night. It lay exposed in the clean

Nothing could possibly go wrong. He had everything worked out. First, of course, he had to kill Wanda . . .

BY
FLETCHER FLORA

lines of a face that might have made him a matinee idol if he had possessed even the rudiments of acting ability. His vanity was, as a matter of fact, almost a disease. It approached narcissism. It was the kind of vanity that, when it has no particular talents to exploit, acquires in frustration a special evil. It is

frequently found in criminals.

Moving quietly and quickly, he shaved, brushed his teeth and hair, made all use of the bathroom that he would need to make. When he

was finished, he removed a hypodermic syringe from the medicine cabinet and loaded the barrel with a potent anaesthetic he had acquired with considerable difficulty. Carrying the loaded syringe, he went back into the bedroom.

His wife Wanda slept in peace, her lips curved in the slightest smile over protuberant teeth. Her hair, fanned untidily on the white pillow around her head, was sparse and a kind of dun color, the color of a common mouse. It occurred to him, as he stood looking down at her with the syringe in his hand, that she possessed many characteristics that combined to achieve that mouse-like impression — the hair, the teeth, an overall scurrying timidity that seemed to view the world with bright, apprehensive eyes. A strange sort of woman to have a million dollars in her own name. Tragedies sometimes develop from incongruities like that — a woman like Wanda with that kind of money. This thought occurred to him, too, in those final moments before he acted, but the thought stimulated in him no pity, no abortive remorse.

She was sleeping on her back, her left arm curled up around her head on the pillow. Her hand was turned palm upward, which exposed the soft underside of her wrist, and this made the job easier, of course. He could see without difficulty, even standing erect, a linear bulge of pale blue vein. He sat down beside her on the edge of the bed, and she

sighed and stirred but didn't waken. Taking hold of the hand on the pillow and leaning his weight suddenly down upon her body, he slipped the sharp needle of the syringe into the soft flesh of her wrist and forced the plunger down.

She awoke with a sharp little cry, her eyes flying open with almost instantaneous understanding and terror, the understanding that what should have been the beginning of only another day was in fact the beginning of the last day. The initial cry repeated itself over and over, issuing from her throat like a pathetic, stereotyped plea, and her small body threshed futilely against the pressure of his. The anaesthetic injected, he placed both hands upon her shoulders and pinned her firmly, applying no more force than necessary and being careful not to dig into her flesh with his fingers. For he wanted no bruises. No signs of struggle.

The anaesthetic worked swiftly, and it was hardly any time at all until she slipped into an imitation of death that was, for her, a prelude to the real thing. He stood erect again, breathing deeply, sucking in and expelling air in a slow, rhythmic cadence. The needle, he saw, had torn the flesh of her wrist a little, but not seriously. The tiny wound would, as he had planned, be easily included in a later and larger one.

Turning away, he returned to the bathroom and ran cold water into the tub. While the water was run-

ning, he unwrapped a new razor blade and laid the shining and deadly bit of edged steel on the lavatory in readiness. Then, watching the water rise slowly in the tub, he considered details. How would she do it? Would she sit in the tub in the water? The idea of the bloody water staining the flesh of her body was repulsive to him, and he was certain that it would be repulsive to her. It was something she wouldn't do, to sit in the water like that. No. She would be more likely to kneel beside the tub and let her arm hang over the edge. Or, better yet, she would sit. She would sit at one end, sidewise to the tub with her back against the wall, letting the arm hang over into the water. That would be the natural way, the comfortable way, the way she would probably do it if she were doing it of her own volition. Satisfied, he shut off the water taps and went back to her bed.

She was light in his arms. So very light. She must have weighed no more than a hundred pounds. Cradled in his arms, she looked like a sleeping child, her head dropping forward against his shoulder with an appearance of affection. Of this appearance, however, he was unaware. He was unaware of everything except the dominant necessity to do the thing right. In the bathroom, he set her on the floor in the position he had decided upon and recovered the tiny blade from the lavatory. He wiped it clean on a bit of tissue

and put it between the thumb and index finger of her right hand. Holding it that way, between the two digits, he made the necessary quick incision in her left wrist and permitted the blade to drop free into the water. That's what would happen, he thought. She would certainly let the blade drop into the water.

Around her submerged hand and wrist, the water reddened swiftly, the depth of the color fading at its spreading fringe to a sickly pink. He watched for a moment the spreading stain, and then he left the bathroom for the last time. He left her for the last time, too, of course, but he felt no particular sense of parting. Even in the intimacy of marriage, he had been aware of her only vaguely as a person. Primarily as a symbol, a source of supply, a kind of million dollar personification.

He moved unhurriedly around the bedroom, gathering his clothes. He dressed with his usual fastidious attention to details, and the result of all this careful attention was, strangely, an effect of casual perfection, as if he'd just thrown his clothes on anyway and they had somehow assumed just the right drape and lines. When he was dressed, he packed an expensive leather bag with additional items of clothing and set the bag on the floor by the door through which he would leave. Crossing the room from the door, he sat down at a desk between windows and wrote a few lines on a

single crisp sheet of paper, the top sheet of Wanda's stationery, which she'd touched, so that her prints were undoubtedly on it. He already had the lines formulated in his mind, and so he wrote swiftly: *Dear Wanda, I've tried to be honest with you about Carol, and I'm trying to be honest now. We've decided to marry as soon as I can get free. I'm going to a hotel and will send later for the rest of my things. Please don't try to contact me personally, but I'll be happy to talk with your lawyer about a divorce. I assure you that I'll cooperate fully, and I'm very sorry if this causes you any distress.*

He signed the note with his first name only and then crumpled the paper in his hand and dropped it on the floor, as it might have been crumpled and dropped by someone in a powerful emotional reaction. By a mousy little woman, for example, whose handsome and adored husband was leaving her. A pathetic little woman, really, in spite of a million dollars, who could find, in the bitterness of desertion and in the distorted satisfaction of a terrible recrimination, the final strength it would take to slash her wrist.

His lips twitched with a touch of irony at the idea of recrimination, and he went over and picked up his bag and left, locking the door of the apartment behind him.

Walking down the hall to the elevator, he was a picture of ease and well-being, one of life's lucky boys, broad shoulders and narrow

hips accentuated subtly by fine tailoring. The rhythmic scissoring of his legs was crisp and certain but managed to convey an impression of effortless motion that contributed to a total effect of thoroughbred arrogance. He was a man whose mind was untroubled by intimations of misfortune or suffering or disgrace. He was a man to whom such things just didn't happen.

The elevator boy, who secretly hated his guts, smiled pleasantly with a professional regard for the side of the bread the butter was on. "Good morning, Mr. Bruce. Leaving us for a while?"

Charles glanced down at the bag in his hand and nodded shortly. "Yes."

His incisive monosyllable discouraged further questions, and the operator, watching the straight back, almost military in bearing, cross the lobby downstairs and exit through the street doors, compensated for the feeling of inadequacy Charles always gave him by calling him mentally a conceited bastard.

Outside on the curb, Charles waited a few moments until he caught the eye of a cruising cabby. "Ambassador Hotel," he said, and relaxed in the back seat. The cabby shot a glance at his reflected face in the rear view mirror, and he also, like the elevator boy, used mentally the word bastard. The term was prompted by a kind of impersonal envy, however, and was qualified by the word lucky instead of

conceited. Some guys have all the luck. Looks and dough. Nothing on their minds but spending the next buck on the next beautiful dame.

As a matter of fact, Charles wasn't thinking of money and women at all. Not that he didn't think of them quite often. It was just, at the moment, that he was absorbed by another matter that had gained temporary dominance. Sitting there in the back seat of the cab, watching through glass the streets that assumed in the early sun a sparkling, deceptive look of cleanliness, he wondered how long it took for a life to drain away through a neatly opened artery in the wrist. He had for a moment a very vivid vision of darkening water, but he was, apparently, not disturbed by the vision. Looking out at the sparkling streets he didn't see, he even smiled a little now and then.

He was admitted to the lobby of the Ambassador by a doorman six and a half feet tall (all the doormen at the Ambassador had industrious pituitaries; this gave them a special look; in their vivid uniforms, a kind of Queen's Guard look) and he was relieved of his bag by a bellhop who looked like a sophomore out of the best frat in a good college, which was another calculated specialty of the Ambassador. At the desk, he was subjected to a cool appraisal by a cool clerk who might have been, from his appearance, a controlling stockholder in the cor-

poration that owned the string of fancy hotels of which the Ambassador was one. Charles did not mind the appraisal. He was hardly aware of it. He was so used to acceptance, even privilege, that the possibility of anything else had ceased to be a concern in his life. He signed for a room and ascended ten floors with the bellhop.

Alone in his room, he unpacked his bag and disposed of the contents neatly. Then he put the bag in the closet and sat down for a cigarette. Reviewing his activity dispassionately to that point, he could think of nothing that he had done or failed to do that was sufficient to crack his calm assurance. He had proceeded throughout with bold strokes. Except for the one major point of murder, he had been perfectly open. He had mentioned Carol in the note, and his affair with her could be verified by several parties, although he had been careful that Wanda herself had known nothing of it. He had been so open that no one, not even the most obtuse investigator out of Homicide, if it came to that, would suspect him of murdering Wanda for motives that could so easily be pinned on him. But he didn't for a moment really think that it would ever come to Homicide. The alternate was too credible. An ugly, neurotic little woman like Wanda and a man like him. Suicide, indeed, would be the *only* really credible disposition of the case.

But wouldn't she have taken steps to exclude him legally from inheritance? Wouldn't she have seen to it, in the end, that he could never touch that beautiful million? This, of course, was ridiculous. He smiled dreamily into the thin blue smoke of his cigarette, thinking what any competent psychiatrist would do to a contention like that. A shattered woman committing suicide in the intensity of neurotic anguish simply doesn't take time to tie up loose ends. If she was capable of that she would never commit suicide at all. No. She would do it as it would be assumed that Wanda had done it, quickly and blindly and without rational thought.

Having been open to this point, the strategy would be, of course, to continue that way. No reason at all, for example, why he shouldn't see Carol. As a matter of fact, it would strengthen his position as a man who had not tried to dissemble and had nothing to hide.

Passing to Carol, his thoughts lost their cool quality of detachment. They acquired, as they always did when she was their subject, heat and a certain wildness, reverting now to the remembrance of past instances in his relationship with her, and now pressing forward hotly to the anticipation of more to come. Carol, beautiful and hard and calculating Carol, his kind of woman, stone and fire, remembered and anticipated in a hundred positions and places. In the soft and scented and designed

dusk of a dozen fancy lounges with a thin stem of brittle glass between her scarlet-tipped fingers and her lips glistening from the touch of a martini or a daiquiri or a Pink Lady or whatever it happened to be at that particular time. In sand and sun with her golden-brown body barely broken by flimsy scraps. In other places when it was broken by nothing whatever.

At this moment she would be in bed, still asleep, her heavy pale hair shining on the pillow, her exciting body shadowed slightly by a haze of sheer nylon. Her lips would be parted, just barely parted, with bright enamel just visible between them, and the shadows of lashes that were real would be cast below closed lids. The imagery of her lying there like that was so strong in his mind, so real and so prescient, that he forgot completely, for a while, the image of the other woman who was still a pertinent factor in his life, the one sitting by the tub with her arm dangling in red water. The one who also slept, but differently and more deeply.

He sat in the room for perhaps thirty minutes, and then he went out and caught a cab, and within another thirty minutes he was ringing the bell of the door behind which was the reality of his imagery. It took her a long time to open the door, verifying the validity of his thoughts of her asleep, and when she finally came, she had pulled over the haze of nylon a second haze that

did a little, but not much, to diminish transparency. He went in, and she closed the door behind him, and they met and fused in a spontaneous generation of heat that was a kind of emotional combustion. Her lips were restless and hungry, her hands and body aggressive in quest.

After a while, hunger somewhat abated, she said, "Did you do it, Charles?"

"Yes," he said. "It's done."

"She's dead?"

"Certainly. You can't bleed freely very long and not die."

"Was it hard?"

"No. It was simple. Very easy. It went just the way I planned it." He went over to a table and helped himself to a cigarette from a silver box. He made no motion to light the cigarette but stood revolving it slowly between the fingers of his two hands. "The hard part is coming up. It'll take guts, darling."

She followed him to the table and took the cigarette from him. She carried it to her lips between index and middle fingers and waited with the cigarette still between the fingers until he had picked up the lighter that matched the box and furnished flame. She exhaled smoke in a long plume, and her lips curled around the cigarette in a quiet little smile that suggested some kind of amusing esoteric knowledge.

"Don't worry about my guts," she said.

He took one of her hands and held

it palm up, stroking the palm slowly and softly. "Are you sure? Are you quite positive you can take it? Her supposed suicide will create a hell of a stink. We'll be torn to shreds. You know the things that will be said. Lots of people will call us a pair of murderers. Morally, that is."

"Morally?" She lifted shoulders to indicate what she thought of *morally*. "What about legally?"

"Legally we're safe enough. They can't substantiate anything by suicide. I doubt if they'll even seriously consider anything but that."

"What about the money?"

"It's all right, I tell you. The only thing that's left is to carry the thing through. If you play it wrong, if you say the wrong things or break down the least little bit, we're sunk. If we give them nothing more than they have now, they can never definitely establish anything against us even if someone gets an idea or two."

She turned away from him and crossed to the windows. Against the light, the double haze of nylon was nearly dissolved. He stood behind her, watching her, the pulses in his temples and throat throbbing suddenly and painfully like a trio of malignancies. She looked out into the bright light and spoke to him over her shoulder.

"Look, darling. You talk about my guts. You talk about my breaking down. I thought you knew me better than that. I thought you knew me as well as I've ever been

known by anyone on earth. I guess I was mistaken, though, and so I'd better set you right. To look at me now you might not realize it, but I was one of seven kids. My old man was a beery bum, and my old lady was a whining slattern. I've eaten so damn much bread and potatoes just to fill my belly that I never want to see a potato or a loaf of bread again. I've worn cast-off clothes that weren't fit to wear when they were new, and I've had rags against my skin that were so damn rough they gave me gall. I got me a philosophy early in life, darling, and there isn't anything in it, not one damn thing except what happens in bed, that you aren't supposed to pay income tax on."

She turned suddenly and faced him. "Look at me. I'm soft, aren't I? I'm lots of fun in the right time and place, aren't I? Just a soft, generous girl? If you got that idea, you're crazy. I want you all right, darling, I want you like hell, but I want you with a million bucks, and I wouldn't have you for keeps any other way. Now forget about my guts, darling. And forget about my caring a damn what anyone thinks or says."

He went over to her then, and she was soft, as he had known perfectly well she was, and she was also hard, as a diamond beneath the softness, and he had really known that perfectly well, too. Not that he cared. He preferred it that way. It only made him want her

more, because he was, after all, just the kind of man who would want a woman like that.

They used up an hour, and when he was ready to leave, he said, "I mentioned your name in the note. That means someone will probably be here on his way to me. When he comes, whoever he is, tell him I'm at the Ambassador, and I'll be there waiting for him. Open trail leading nowhere, that's the strategy, darling."

"When do you think they'll find her?"

"It's our maid's day off, so possibly not until morning. But it doesn't matter. It's all set up for them, whenever it is."

She touched the tip of a finger to her lips and his. "Okay. Whoever it is and whenever it is, I'll send him on."

He left her with that and went back to the Ambassador, and it was about nine hours later when he heard her voice again. The next time was on the telephone, and he was just thinking about going down to the dining room for some dinner when the bell rang.

He lifted the instrument and said hello, and she said, "He was here, darling. He just left."

"Already? Who found her? How did it happen?"

"I didn't ask. I didn't think it would be a good idea to sound too curious about things like that."

"All right. I'll wait for him here."

He hung up and waited, and it

was only a short time before the desk rang up to tell him that there was a man from the police to see him. He told the desk to send the man up, and he waited the last couple of minutes in the open doorway to the hall.

The cop was a thin, middle-aged man with shoulders stooped almost to the point of deformity, and this seemed to make his arms hang down farther than normal, which gave him, in that one respect, a rather simian appearance. He took off his hat politely and spoke with a tired voice.

"Mr. Bruce?"

"Yes. Are you the policeman?"

"That's right. Name's Benson."

"Come in, please. I've been wondering what on earth you could want with me."

Benson walked into the room and turned as Charles closed the door.

"I'm afraid it's bad news. Your wife, Mr. Bruce. She's dead."

"Dead!" Charles gave a passable impression of shock. "She was all right this morning when I left. That is, I assume she was. As a matter of fact, she was still sleeping, and I didn't disturb her."

"Maybe you disturbed her a hell of a lot more than you thought, Mr. Bruce. Anyhow, she's dead."

Charles ran fingers through his hair and worked his features into a simulation of concern. "See here, Mr. Benson . . ."

"Sergeant."

"All right. Sergeant. The point

is, I may be somewhat responsible if Wanda's done anything . . ."

"We found the note."

"I see. Well . . ."

Benson cut across his words with a gusty sigh and said with quiet bitterness, "Look, Mr. Bruce. I'm not the one to explain it to. I'm just a guy running an errand. There's a big-shot lieutenant down at Headquarters wants to talk with you. He's the one, so if you'll just come along."

"Very well. I suppose there are certain formalities in these matters."

"That's right, Mr. Bruce. Formalities."

It was a short ride to Headquarters. The traffic was heavy, but Benson threaded the police car through it expertly, and they were there quickly. They found the lieutenant in a small room sparsely furnished with essential items, and he was a younger man than Benson, although he ranked him, and this might have been a reason for Benson's tired and quiet bitterness. The lieutenant's name turned out to be Tomlinson. He had a hard square face and competent square hands, and his brain was fairly effective, too. Next to being a lieutenant, he was proudest of knowing about things like predicate nominatives and how to use them. He studied books at home.

He introduced himself. "Thanks for coming, Mr. Bruce. I'm Lieutenant Tomlinson of Homicide."

Homicide, he said. So it had come

to that so soon. After the initial shock, Charles wasn't especially concerned, however. He imagined, thinking about it, that probably all suicides were at least perfunctorily investigated by Homicide.

He sat down and said, "Sergeant Benson tells me my wife is dead, Lieutenant, but that's all I know. I wish you would be kind enough to explain."

"Certainly, Mr. Bruce. I'll explain some things to you, and you can explain some to me. That's why you're here. Your wife apparently committed suicide."

Charles sagged a little in his chair, doing it quite effectively. He was silent for a moment, staring at the floor, before he spoke again.

"I was afraid of that, with the police concerned and all."

"Was that the only reason you were afraid of it? Because the police were concerned?"

"No. Sergeant Benson has told me that you found my note, so you must be aware of my grounds for fear. I may say in defense, however, that I never really thought she'd do it."

"Do what?"

Charles let his eyebrows rise in a brief expression of cold surprise. "Why, kill herself because I left her, of course."

"You think she did that?"

"It certainly seems very obvious."

Lieutenant Tomlinson shook his head slowly. "I don't think so." He kept on shaking his head, and his

face seemed suddenly much older. "As a matter of fact, I don't think she killed herself at all. I think she was killed. Possibly by you, Mr. Bruce."

The sudden violent constriction in his chest was a kind of pain that Charles had never known. It was as though a powerful centripetal force had closed in upon his heart, and he wanted to cry out with the pain, but nothing of what he felt showed in his face. Not the least indication of it. There was nothing in his face but icy and arrogant disdain.

"You're insane," he said.

"Perhaps." Tomlinson turned sideways and said, "Mr. Creely."

That was the first instant that Charles was aware of a fourth person in the room. The man called Creely stood up from his chair against a wall and came forward. He was about the same height as Charles but much thinner, with narrow shoulders, and he must have been twenty years older. He was dressed in a conservative gray suit that was obviously expensive, and he used the cane in his right hand, leaning upon it heavily, as if it were utilitarian. His face was deeply lined, beginning to sag a little from its frame.

Tomlinson said, "Mr. Creely's the one who found your wife."

Charles stood to face Creely. "How could that be so? I believe I know all my wife's friends, and this man is a stranger. If she was dead in the apartment, who let him in?"

"No one let me in, Mr. Bruce." Creely's voice was dry and precise. "I let myself in. With this."

He extended a hand, palm up, and lying in the palm was a key. Charles lifted incredulous eyes from the key to Creely's face, and he experienced a feeling that might have been terror when he saw the steady, virulent hatred in the man's eyes. It's always a shock to see hatred in the eyes of a stranger.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Don't you?" Creely's laugh was an arid whisper. "Surely a man like you has no difficulty in understanding the significance of a key to a lady's apartment. I used it discreetly, Mr. Bruce. Only on those occasions — rather frequent, I must say — when you were using the one you have to another lady's apartment."

Tomlinson cut back in, speaking slowly in a kind of cadence timed by the shaking of his head, "Your wife was apparently having an affair, Mr. Bruce. Just as you were. Mr. Creely

has been able to establish pretty definitely that he and your wife planned marriage. It seems she intended to tell you within a few days." He stopped talking, but his head kept right on shaking, and after a moment his voice picked up the tempo again. "So you see, Mr. Bruce, it isn't likely your wife would have killed herself because you'd left her. It isn't likely she'd have cared at all."

That was the wholly incredible thing. The thing that had never seriously crossed his mind. That she wouldn't care. Most of all, that she had planned to leave him — *him!* — for a gray, sagging, crippled specimen like Creely. And in the final phase of his destruction, with the terrible realization that the police would pin it on him since they knew Wanda was not a suicide, it was the cruel cut to his vanity that hurt him most. It actually drove him a little mad.

It took both Tomlinson and Benson to pull him off Creely.



Mack didn't know why he was worried. The woman only wanted to stay until the next bus. Then she took out a gun . . .

BY R. VAN TAYLOR

HE HAD gotten some beauties out of the canyon that morning, enough to complete the order for the pharmaceutical concern in St. Louis. One big boy was really a prize. It would have measured a good six feet from the tip of its deadly head to the end of its unique

tail, which emitted the most terrifying sound in the desert. Although Mack Blayne could have gotten a good price for this one by itself, to show his appreciation for their past business he put it into the heavily screened and reënforced shipping crate marked in prominent red:

The Woman on the Bus



DANGER — POISONOUS SNAKES.

For the past three days, with Helen gone, Mack had had his hands full. Getting up this order, cooking the meals, repairing the desert cooler which had started to act up yesterday, and his almost continuous efforts to keep Petey pacified had him fairly well bushed. Especially Petey. In typical three-year-old fashion, less than an hour after his mother had departed, Petey had emotionally decided that he had wanted to go to El Paso with her after all. And for the entire three days he had expertly and dramatically exploited this theme to its nerve-racking maximum. Understandably, Mack looked forward to tonight. Shortly before the old and prized Ingraham struck eight, he and Petey would get into the station wagon and drive the quarter of a mile to the highway and wait for Helen's bus.

But Petey, out of what Mack knew was wishful thinking, was far from convinced that his mother would not return that afternoon. For the past ten minutes now he had been standing at the window, his little hands in and out of his blue jeans, intently watching the road for the westbound three-fifteen. Mack did not try to reason with him. At least Petey was quiet and staying out of mischief, which gave Mack the opportunity to work on the invoice for his last order of rattlers.

His index finger was in the process of finding an elusive key on his battered portable when Petey, with great physical enthusiasm, cried:

"Daddy, daddy — I see mommy!"

Mildly surprised and certain that Petey did see something, Mack got up from the card table and went to the window. Across the flat of scorched earth and sage brush he saw what appeared to be a toy bus moving at the base of rugged hills, while at the mailbox, distorted at this distance by the rising heat, was Helen.

"Get your hat, son," Mack said. "Let's hurry. That sun is murder this afternoon."

She was walking up the road to meet them. As Mack slowed down the station wagon and stopped even with her, a slight but noticeable feeling of mixed emotions played in him. Naturally he was surprised, but it was more than that. He was a little uneasy too, because of the strangeness of it.

Petey scrambled across the seat, his knees digging into Mack's lap as he drew himself up to the window. Soberly he said, "You're not my mommy."

The woman ignored Petey. "What time is the next bus?"

From a distance she did resemble Helen, Mack thought. Although at this close range there was a great difference. There was some quality about this woman that caused her to appear more — well, more beauti-

ful in a flashy way. She had short cropped red hair; a woman built to be noticed, both upstairs and downstairs. Her chic blouse and skirt only made the obvious more obvious.

"There's an eastbound around five," Mack said.

"I want to go west," the woman said.

"You just got off a westbound bus," Mack reminded her.

"I know that," she said. "What time is the next one?"

"A little before eight."

From the east came the shrill whine of a speeding car. The woman turned to look at it, and Mack saw her hand tighten on the shoulder strap of her bag. She continued to watch the car intently until it had whizzed past them. Then she turned back to Mack.

"What's up this road?" she said.

"Just my place."

"Will you let me stay up there until the bus tonight?"

"If you're in a hurry you might be able to catch a ride," Mack said.

"I'd rather wait for the bus. I'll pay you if you'll let me stay at your place."

Mack did not particularly relish the idea of having her around, because he had the feeling that something was wrong. But he could not for reasons of conscience let her stay out here at the mercy of the sun. He began to notice other things about her now. She looked beat.

"You don't have to pay," Mack said. "Get in."

The woman came around the car and got in. Petey settled down between them, turned his attention to the woman and said, "Will you play with me when we get home?"

"Sure, little boy," she said, without looking at him.

"I'll drive up to the mailbox and we'll pick up your luggage," Mack said.

"I don't have any," the woman said.

With a growing feeling of uneasiness, Mack turned the station wagon around and headed back to the house.

"You have some kind of trouble on the bus?" Mack said, trying to sound sympathetic rather than concerned over what he was getting into.

"Yes," she said. "There were some men on the bus. I think they were drinking."

"They bothered you?"

"That's right."

"Why didn't you speak to the driver?"

"I didn't want to start any trouble," the woman said. "I thought I'd be able to get another bus faster than this. I didn't know I'd have to wait so long."

It wasn't, Mack thought, a very convincing story.

"Where you from?" he asked.

"East," she said.

"New York?"

"Just east. I've moved around a lot."

"Where you headed now?" Mack said.

"West." Then she added quickly, "Las Vegas."

Petey became restless, demanding attention. "My name is Petey," he said. "What's yours?"

"Virginia," the woman said.

"What are you scared of?"

Quickly and irritably the woman glanced at Petey; then she looked back at the road and said, "I'm not scared, little boy. I'm just tired."

But Mack was inclined to feel that Petey's perception was remarkably clear. As clear as the doubts in his own mind.

At the house, the woman sat down in a chair by the window. She watched the highway.

"You can stretch out on the couch and get some sleep if you want to," Mack said. "You look like you need it."

She had moved the chair so that her back was to the room. "This is fine," she said. "I'll just stay here out of your way. I could use some cigarettes, though. Do you have an extra pack?"

"Sure. I'll get you one."

As Mack went for it, the thought occurred to him that this woman was running — running from someone who was hot on her trail. That's why she had gotten off the bus out here in the middle of nowhere. It would be a very confusing maneuver. Her pursuer, after missing her at the other end of the line, would naturally assume that she had gotten off the bus and would

double back on an east-bound one. And while her pursuer reversed his direction, she would continue west.

This seemed much more logical to Mack than the story she had given him. She looked like the type of woman who would know how to handle a drunk.

So Mack accepted the theory that she was running. Now the important items to consider were: from whom was she running and why?

He got the cigarettes and headed back, glancing at the telephone as he came into the room again. It might not be a bad idea to call Sheriff Hood. Just to be on the safe side. It could be the law this woman was running from. She could be a criminal.

"Here's your cigarettes," Mack said. "I hope they're your brand."

"Yeah — they're okay." The woman took the cigarettes and handed him a quarter.

"You don't owe me anything," he said.

"I want to pay for them," the woman said.

Mack dropped the quarter into his pocket and glanced at the phone again. "If you want to take a bath, you're welcome to."

She started to lean forward, Mack thought, with what seemed to be sudden interest. But it was not a completed movement. In a moment, after she had considered it, she pressed back into the chair and crossed her legs.

"No thanks," she said. "I'll just

sit here and watch the view. There's plenty of it."

"And monotonous, too," Mack said, trying to encourage her. Once she was running water in the bathroom, it would be safe to make the call.

"That's all right," the woman said. "I'm fine right here."

It turned out that, thanks to Petey, it was not quite so monotonous for her after all. He kept up a steady trek from his room to her side, back and forth, each time bringing her some toy for her to inspect. Although the woman did not try to discourage Petey in his attempts to get her to play with him, it was apparent to Mack that she was merely tolerating the child. Her thoughts lay elsewhere. And her real attention was always on the highway.

There were things that Mack should have been doing outside, but he did not want to leave the house. In order to keep his presence from seeming unnatural he manufactured various little jobs that kept him within eyesight of the woman. He worked on the sink drain, finished the invoice and typed an envelope, went through some old records that didn't need going through. The woman avoided all attempts at conversation, and Petey, at last, seemed to be growing tired of her. It was past five, now, and for some minutes the only sound had been the steady, loud ticking of the old Ingraham.

The silence, Mack thought, had a brittle edge.

Had he seen Petey sooner he would have stopped him. Petey, renewing his efforts to gain the woman's attention, had quietly slipped up behind her with his lasso. He made an awkward throw and the loop caught the side of her head.

Instantly the woman was on her feet, whirling, fighting off the rope with one hand, while, in a blurred motion, her other came from her bag holding a small revolver, aimed at a point above Petey's head. Mack found himself standing up, rigid, frozen, his pulse thudding, his eyes following the barrel of the revolver as it came down a few inches.

"Put that gun away," he said.

She seemed blind as she stared at Petey. She began trembling, hard. Her mouth opened as if she were going to yawn, but she did not yawn. She fumbled the gun back into her bag. But her eyes, which still appeared sightless, never left Petey. Then, as the color rushed back into her face, she said, "Don't you ever do that again! Do you hear me? Don't ever do it again!"

Thoroughly frightened by her voice and expression, Petey moved backward until he found the protection of Mack's leg.

"Don't ever do it again!" the woman went on. "Hear me? Never!"

"He's just a little boy," Mack said, trying to sound calm. "He just wanted to play with you. He didn't know that you were nervous. He

didn't know that you had troubles. So don't take them out on him."

Then, clinging to Mack's leg, Petey started crying.

"I'm sorry," the woman said to Petey, but Petey was not convinced.

"I'm sorry, I tell you — stop crying." She glanced at Mack pleadingly. "I don't know anything about talking to kids. Tell him I'm sorry."

Mack gently ruffled Petey's hair. "It's all right, Petey," he said. "Gather up all your toys now and take them back to your room."

"Honest, I'm really sorry," the woman said, talking to Mack now. "It's my nerves. They're — they're all shot."

"That's apparent," Mack said.

"And, I want to tell you something else, mister: I lied about why I got off the bus."

"You did?" Mack said, sounding neither surprised nor aware she had.

"Yes. You see, I got off the bus because I'm going to Reno — that's where I'm going. But my husband was following that bus. He's mean. He told me that he would kill me if I ever tried to divorce him. So that's why I got off the bus. I didn't want him to find me. He's mean. Awful mean. That's — that's why I'm carrying the gun."

"Oh," Mack said.

"Yes. That's why. I thought it would be smart to have it. Just in case. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah. Sure. Look, I'm getting ready to whip up some chow. You'd better eat with us."

"No," the woman said. "I'm not hungry. I've been too much trouble already, anyway. What time did you say that bus was?"

Again Mack told her that the bus came through a little before eight. He told her that they would go down to the highway about a quarter to. Then the woman sat down at the window again and fumbled at the pack of cigarettes, which was almost empty now. Mack turned toward the kitchen, troubled. He sensed that she had given him a phony story again in an effort to explain why she had the gun. It didn't ring true. For a woman who claimed that she was carrying it merely for protection, she had handled it too expertly.

Mack looked at the wall, up above the Ingraham. There, high out of Petey's reach, was Mack's rifle, a lever-action, .250-caliber Savage. Mack always kept it loaded for emergencies.

Mack put on the coffee and scrambled some eggs and fried a little ham. He really didn't have anything to worry about, he decided. The woman wasn't going to cause any trouble. He grinned a little at this thought. He wondered if she really frightened him. Maybe she didn't, but the way she handled that gun did.

Of course, Mack's main concern was for Petey's safety.

He figured that the best thing to do would be to let things rock

along until she had gotten on the bus. Then he'd call Sheriff Hood and tell him about the woman. If she were a criminal, Hood would probably know about it and could take over from there. He'd know which bus she was on and which way she was headed.

That was the sensible thing to do, but it wasn't very satisfying. The human side of Mack wanted to know just what kind of trouble this woman was in. Maybe she wasn't a criminal. Maybe she could be helped.

He fed Petey and then he made a sandwich and poured a mug of coffee and took it into the woman. "Why don't you eat this?" he said.

She started to refuse, but then seemed to change her mind and took the food. She bit into the sandwich half-heartedly, then began to wolf it down. Mack stood there and watched her, and she didn't seem to mind. He began to feel sorry for her, even though he didn't know whether he should or not. She was a frightened animal, he thought. And she would run and run and run from the thing chasing her until she couldn't run anymore; and then, helpless, she'd watch the thing move in and kill her.

Mack sensed this strongly as he watched her. He wanted very much to talk with her, to learn, to know.

She must have had a premonition about what was going on in his mind, for after she had finished the sandwich and was sipping the coffee, she said, "How come you live

out here in this Godforsaken place? Nothing around here at all. Nothing."

He told her how he had gotten started in his business, and explained why it was necessary for him to live here. The idea of the snakes seemed to interest her. She asked him many questions about them, kept him talking. He knew what she was doing. She was faking the interest in order to keep the subject off herself. But he played along. If he talked long enough, maybe he could break through the wall and she would tell him something before the time ran out.

"Sure, we get lonely out here," Mack said, in answer to her question. "Helen breaks the monotony by getting into El Paso every once in a while to see her folks. Petey usually goes with her but last trip he got sick on the bus and didn't want to go this time — that is until Helen was gone.

"But it won't be like this for always," Mack went on. "In a year or so we'll have enough money to buy into a business in El Paso. That'll make it better for Petey all the way around. Good schools, playmates, hospitals if he gets sick."

"Everything you do, you do for the kid, don't you?" the woman said.

"Why not?" Mack said. "He makes the family and the family is the important thing in life."

"I wouldn't know," the woman said.

He thought that he may have detected a tone of regret in her voice, and he felt that the wall of resistance might be breaking. *Now*, he thought. *Ask her now.*

But the woman asked him a question first.

"What'll your wife think when she finds out a strange woman has been in this house all afternoon?"

"She'll believe whatever I tell her," Mack said.

"No suspicions, no nothing, huh?"

"That's right. She knows she has no reason not to believe me."

"She's a fool," the woman said. She twisted in the chair and looked at the clock. "Twenty minutes until eight — what time did you say that bus was?"

Mack knew it was no use. He picked up the dishes. "We'll get out of here right away," he said.

Mack was in Petey's room, getting him ready, when he heard the car stop outside. There were some quick, muffled movements in the living room, too. Mack left Petey and returned to the front. The woman was gone. Someone knocked at the door.

He wanted to look for the woman, but the sound at the door was demanding. It was beginning to grow quite dark now. Mack snapped on the light and went to the door.

There were two men out there. One was considerably larger than the other. They both wore suits and hats with wide, figured bands.

"Good evening," the smaller man said. His voice had an eastern sound to it. New York, maybe. "We're looking for a woman who got off a bus somewhere through here this afternoon. A redhead. About five-six; attractive." Then he added, "We're F.B.I."

Mack had heard so many lies that day that it was easy to recognize another one. Besides, they had not offered any identification. He could not ask them for it — it would be a giveaway.

"No," he said. "I haven't seen anyone."

"There was a girl here," Petey said from behind. "And she still is."

The men came in quickly. Mack did not choose to argue with their guns. He did not blame Petey for what he had done. Previously he had never seen the necessity of teaching his son to lie.

The smaller man, who had very sharp features, gave Mack a glance that was a curse. Then he asked Petey, "Where is this girl?"

Petey had gone to Mack, sensing that something was wrong. "I don't know," he said. "She was here."

"Did she have red hair — you know, red like a barn?"

Petey nodded. "And she had a gun, too," he said in a tone that Mack thought was a little defiant.

"Ouch!" the big man said softly.

The two strangers moved behind Mack and Petey. "All right, Red," the smaller man said loudly, "Where are you?"

They waited for perhaps a minute. There was no sound anywhere in the house, with the exception of the old Ingraham. Mack wished it would stop . . . His rifle . . . Useless. He couldn't do anything that would endanger Petey.

"Go find her," the smaller man told the big one.

The big man's broad features twisted into a grimace. "Are you nuts?"

For a moment the two men stared at each other, hard. Then the big one shrugged. "Okay," he said, "but I'll take the kid as a shield."

The big man reached for Petey but Mack blocked his way. Something exploded against his head. Suddenly he found himself on his hands and knees, his head throbbing, the smaller man glaring down at him as he wiped the barrel of his automatic. Numbly Mack pushed to his feet. He felt the side of his head, saw the blood on his fingertips.

Petey cried and kicked in protest at being held to the chest of the big man. "All right, Red," the big man said, "you might as well give up. I'll find you. If you shoot, you'll hit the kid."

The smaller man grinned at Mack. "That would bother her a lot," he said.

Mack followed Petey's crying through the dark rooms of the house. Maybe the woman would give up, he kept telling himself.

The sudden report went through Mack like a steel shaft.

It was the clock.

It struck eight.

"You oughta get rid of that damn thing," the smaller man said.

The clock drew the smaller man's attention to the rifle. He went over to the wall and took it down. He worked the lever and a shell snapped into the air and spun to the floor. He grinned at Mack. "Nice rifle," he said. He put his automatic in his shoulder holster and kept the Savage.

In a moment the big man came back and dropped Petey. Mack tried to calm him down after he had come to him.

"She must have beat it out the back," the big man told the smaller one. He ran a thumb across his upper lip and flicked the sweat from it.

The smaller man considered this carefully. "Maybe," he said finally. "I'll check."

He left the room, but he was not gone long. He looked excited when he returned. "Red's coming down the road, towards the house. Turn off the light."

"How are we going to watch these guys if it's dark?"

"Give me the kid. This fellow won't do anything as long as I have a gun on his kid."

"That's my wife coming down the road," Mack said. "She just got off the bus. We were supposed to meet her. She thinks something is wrong because we didn't. It's my wife."

"He's lying," the big man said, "like he did the first time."

The smaller man grabbed Petey, closing a hand over the little boy's mouth. "Hit the lights."

"It's my wife, I tell you!" Mack said.

"Shut up."

The darkness closed in on Mack like a paralysis. He saw the shadow of the big man at the window, gun in hand.

"You've got to listen to me," Mack said. "That's my wife out there."

The big man said nervously, "She's still coming. When do you want me to get her?"

"How close is she?" the smaller man asked.

"Almost to the car. She could dodge behind it."

A warning yell was trying to burst from Mack's throat. He heard Petey whimper.

"Better not wait too long," the smaller man said.

"Mack? Mack?" It was Helen's voice.

"Hold up," the smaller man said. "That's not Red's voice."

They waited. Mack heard, above the roar in his head, Helen's footsteps on the porch. The door opened into the dark room. "Mack? Petey?" The light came on.

Slowly Helen's hand came up to her mouth. Mack thought she was going to faint.

"Get over there," someone ordered her; Mack did not remember

who said it. All he knew was that now he had his arm about Helen and that he could feel her trembling and that Petey was with them. He wanted to explain to Helen, but he could not explain, now. He knew the terror that must be in her.

"Red must have beat it, like I said," It was the big man speaking.

The smaller man was eyeing Mack thoughtfully. "This guy," he said, nodding at Mack, "oughta know this desert. You and him go out there and track her. I'll stay here."

"Why don't you go?" the big man wanted to know.

"Get going and find her."

The woman at the doorway said, "That won't be necessary."

All Mack could see of her was the hand holding the gun. The small man's body twitched violently, as if he had with instantaneous reasoning checked the powerful impulse to whirl and fire. There was no such reaction in the big man. He seemed lifeless until he said:

"For God's sake, don't shoot!"

"It wouldn't do you any good," the smaller man said.

"I know it," the woman said. She sounded exhausted to the point of collapse. "I'm tired of running. I'll go back with you."

An expression of puzzlement filled the smaller man's face. "Now you're being sensible," he said.

"But I want your promise on one thing," she went on. "You leave these people alone — you don't harm them at all."

"What difference would that make to her?" the big man said. "I don't like this."

"Be quiet," the smaller man said. He kept looking toward the dark doorway.

"Hurry up before I change my mind," the woman said. "Is it a deal?"

"Sure, Red, it's a deal. But I've got a condition, too: You've got to give us your gun."

"All right," she said. The revolver made a sharp thud as it hit the floor just inside the doorway. "Let's go."

The big man said, "You drive, Red. That'll keep you busy, and we'll also be able to keep a better eye on you, that way."

The woman stared at him for a minute, a funny look, almost like a lopsided smile, on her face. Then she said tiredly, "All right, I'll drive."

The smaller man was unloading Mack's rifle. "I'll leave this outside," he said. "And it would be wise if you forgot about tonight. We have lots of friends."

As soon as they had left, Mack went outside and picked up the rifle and re-loaded it. Then he called Sheriff Hood and told him what had happened, that the car was heading east on the highway, and that they had forced the woman to drive. Hood said that the descriptions of the people didn't mean anything to him, but that he'd get on it right away.

Helen had picked up the details

by listening. Afterwards they went into the kitchen and made some coffee and it wasn't long before Petey had dropped off into an exhausted sleep while Helen held him.

"What I can't figure out," Mack said, "is why she came back. She was scared of those men, whoever they were. Really frightened. Yet, at the risk of her own life, she came back and faced them. Surrendered. I believe those men will kill her. It doesn't make sense. She could have gotten away."

Helen had just returned, an hour later, from putting Petey to bed when the phone rang. It was Sheriff Hood.

"Mack, thought you'd like to know that we found them. They plowed into that culvert about thirty miles from your place. They're all dead."

When Mack did not answer, Hood continued. "You'd better come in tomorrow morning and make a statement and identify the bodies."

"Sure," Mack said. "Pretty bad wreck, huh?"

"Sure was. The woman must have been doing better than seventy when they hit. Funny thing—I don't believe it was the wreck that actually killed the woman."

"What do you mean?"

"She died of snakebite."

"What?"

"Yeah—that's right. What I figure happened when she was trying to get away from those fellows

out at your place was that she went down into the canyon. That poor girl had been bitten at least a dozen times — you should have seen her legs! I guess she drove that car until she conked out. She must have known she was dying. I don't know how she lasted that long, or even how she lasted long enough to make it back to your place and do what

she did. But it was a lucky thing for you that she did, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," Mack said. He hung up. He tried to fight off the feeling that had clamped down on him.

He went back to the kitchen and told Helen about it.

They talked for a long time, and it was after two before they finally turned in.



The Murder Market

BY H. H. HOLMES

THERE'S a tradition in the publishing business that readers of hardbound books don't want short stories. It's a tradition, I'm happy to say, that is gradually breaking down; there've been a half dozen markedly successful books of shorts recently in the field of general fiction — and science-fantasy collections keep appearing, God help us, at the rate of approximately one every two weeks.

Short stories of crime and detection are still uncommon in book form; maybe the reader-demand is slight . . . but certainly not among the readers of this column. You like shorts, or you wouldn't be reading this magazine. And even the confirmed novel-only reader might be converted by collections as good as MWA's *Crooks' Tour* (reviewed here last month) or the eighth annual volume of *The Queen's Awards* (Little, Brown, \$3).

It's almost unbelievable; but Ellery Queen has, in 15 years, edited 19 anthologies of crime — and this latest must rank as one of his very best. Whatever your tastes, you'll find something here for you: subtle psychology from Charlotte Armstrong and Roy Vickers; harsh realism from Eleazar Lipsky and Howard Schoenfeld; pure deduction from

Thomas Kyd and A. H. Z. Carr; eighteenth-century detection from Lillian de la Torre — even a legitimate fantasy-whodunit, by C. B. Gilford, in which the detective is the Archangel Michael himself! It's as thoroughly satisfactory a lot as the annual contest of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* has produced in years — and in view of the continued success of these selections from one magazine, along with similar volumes from the *Post* and from various science fiction pulps, isn't it about time that some book publisher looked into the possibilities of *Manhunt*? MURDER FOR EVERYBODY: Any reader of crime novels (or for that matter, of novels, unqualified) will find something to gratify him in Michael Gilbert's *Fear to Tread* (Harper, \$2.75). This is a study of organized crime in London — what used to be known as the Black Market and is now more politely called Redistribution — and the story of how a schoolmaster was forced to take arms against a sea of evils . . . and how he learned that gallant lone-wolf defiance of a gang is successful only in fiction. It's at once a complex novel of character, a fascinating sociological survey, and a hell of an exciting out-and-out thriller, rich in action, violence and surprise. An-

other unusually able blend of character and melodrama is Ben Benson's *Target in Taffeta* (Mill-Morrow, \$2.75), the best to date of Mr. Benson's always interesting novels of State Police Inspector Wade Paris. The highly competent but somewhat aloof and perturbed Paris is one of the most believable professional law-enforcement officers in fiction; in this volume, we learn more about him personally and at the same time are carried along by the tension of one of his toughest problems: the safeguarding of a key witness to murder who may be rubbed out or may, worse yet perhaps, simply decide not to testify. In all, a fine combination of subtlety with tight hardness.

FAST AND FURIOUS: For the second time this year, Charles Williams comes up with one of the top entries in relentlessly paced storytelling: *Nothing in her Way* (Gold Medal, 25c). This one is all about con games, opening with a very funny half-parody version of the pigeon drop and going on to two of the most intricate and psychologically irresistible large-scale frauds you've ever encountered. There's a strange sort of love story, in which the girl's accomplice learns that his real rival is her passionate absorption in deceit-as-a-fine-art; and Mr. Williams has an inexhaustible repertory of suspense-tricks to keep you marveling on every page. The Old Master of supersonic speed, Erle Stanley Gardner, is in first-rate form

in *The Case of the Green-Eyed Sister* (Morrow, \$2.75), in which Perry Mason takes on a client even more deviously unconventional than he is himself. Some noble new gimmicks in tape-recording evidence and one of Mason's most masterly displays of courtroom technique place this among his better cases — very nearly as good as 1953's earlier *The Case of the Hesitant Hostess*. I guess you might call Mel Colton's *Double Take* (Ace, 35c) supersonic too: it's faster than it is sound. It too has a lawyer-detective, but he seems to have more of an affinity for broads and beatings than for Blackstone. All pretty familiar stuff, complete with nightclub and oversexed wench (who even indulges in rape), but lively and readable. (The same double-volume includes a reprint of a good 1944 Bruno Fischer novel.)

STANDARD STABLE: Fast-action addicts are warned off, but others should find much that's rewarding in the latest case of E. C. R. Lorac's Chief Inspector Macdonald, *Shepherd's Crook* (Crime Club, \$2.75). Here Macdonald takes a vacation in the sheep-raising country high in the fells of Lancashire, and gets drawn into a business of arson, accidental murder, and 300-year-old motives. The book's as quiet and unhurried as the pastoral life it describes in such rich detail; and like that life, it should prove gratifyingly refreshing after too much urban hurly-burly. Delano Ames's Dago-bert Brown is, I'm happy to say,

not too prominent in his newest adventure, *No Mourning for the Matador* (Washburn, \$2.50). The focus is not so much on this painfully precious amateur detective as on the good solid things of life in Barcelona: eating and bull-fighting and, above all, drinking, with some of the best pub-crawling that's appeared outside of the works of Elliott Paul. Stephen Ransome, who is his own detective-character, meets up with a pretty variation on the theme of overhearing a murder by telephone in *Hear No Evil* (Crime Club, \$2.75); not much mystery here, but a lot of well-built suspense in the small-town repercussions of crime.

CONNOISSEURS' CORNER: Matthew Head's *Another Man's Life* (Simon & Schuster, \$2.50) is one of the shortest murder novels of the season, almost what some call a novella, but also one of the most fully fleshed. Head wastes no time on superfluties, but deliberately brings on stage only four characters: a philanthropist who is also a murderer, and three of his proteges, one of whom is also to be his victim. By the time the murder happens, you know each of those four people as you rarely come to know any character in mystery fiction, and you've enjoyed the literary craftsmanship to be expected from the author of *The Smell of Money* and *The Cabinda Affair*.

SPIES AND COUNTERSPIES: Steve Frazee's *The Sky Block* (Rinehart,

\$2.75) mixes a little science fiction into its espionage, as the Army, the FBI and a dozen other government agencies trip over each other trying to locate a secret Soviet device which devastatingly controls the weather. The Rocky Mountain background is admirably visualized; and if some characters are a little too thin for you to care which side they turn out to be on, FBI Agent Clement Raven is a memorable investigator. *Margin of Terror* (Dodd, Mead, \$2.50) brings William P. McGivern into the espionage field, with an Ambleresque plot dealing with an American abroad forced against his intentions to frustrate a Soviet kidnapping. McGivern's such a solid old pro that a rather over-familiar story comes off well; but it's pretty far from being another *The Big Heat*.

PERIOD PIECE: Edgar Wallace was (as the newest readers may need to be reminded) one of the most prolific and best-selling mystery novelists of all time. You might have some fun looking into *The Crimson Circle* (Crime Club, \$2.50), a reissue of a 1922 novel; it's still a good piece of slam-bang storytelling, but you'll probably find its plot simple and its notions of criminal gangs naively remote from reality. Wonder just how our own bestsellers will seem in 30 years?

... AND SOME OTHERS

Besides the mysteries, crime novels and fact-crime books reviewed above,

several general books deserve the attention of *Manhunt* readers. Though they're not in the mystery field, the following are well worth a place on your shelf:

Who He? by Alfred Bester (Dial, \$3.50) is a fast-paced, bitter and satiric novel of death and destruction in a TV studio. Warning: don't start reading this one late at night; you're not going to be able to put it down.

A House Is Not A Home by Polly Adler (Rinehart, \$4.00) is a fascinating account of a successful, if uninhibited, businesswoman. It deserves best-sellerdom — but if you happen to be a prude don't pick this one up.

The Civil War by James Street (Dial, \$3.00) deals with "the late but still lively hostilities" of 1861-65 in a way that will not be found in more stolid texts. Guaranteed to

rile up the South and madden the North, this is a book for lively argument. Buy two copies — it makes a fine Christmas present for your most argumentative friend.

The success story of the Fabulous Trio — Rodgers, Hart and Hammerstein makes a dazzling and eminently readable book in *Some Enchanted Evenings* (Harper, \$3.95). Deems Taylor, the famous musicologist and critic, has turned out possibly his finest book this time.

The Steig Album (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, \$3.95) is a reprinting under one cover of Steig's seven books of cartoons. No more need be said to the initiate — to the few who've never seen William Steig's work, let us state that he's the most perceptive, and one of the funniest, artists alive. This one's a must.

— HW



Broken Doll



It had been a fine trip, up to a point. A steel point, with four inches of knife behind it.

BY JACK WEBB

IT WAS a crisp, cold night with enough of a breeze off the ocean to drive the smog inland, so the city must have looked like a blanket of stars as they slid down toward the landing strips on the airfield.

Even for her it must have been a beautiful flight up to a point, a sharp point with four inches of steel behind it.

Flight 1405 was in from San Francisco on

schedule. Attendants rolled the stairs out to the edge of the white parking circle. The midget truck pulled up with its empty baggage trailer. The ground crewman, guiding the pilot with his two cones of light, snapped them off when the plane braked to a halt.

That's one thing about the Airport Detail. When you're not messing around with lost kids, or lending a hand to Customs, or putting the screws to a dip because you've got nothing on him and want to get him off the grounds before somebody loses his roll, there are things to watch, things always happening, and you get the same kind of fine, excited pleasure you used to have as a kid when a circus put up on the edge of town.

We watched Flight 1405 come in from where we were standing on the flight deck of the second story airport restaurant. Below us, lined up along the fence, were the people waiting for the passengers to disembark from the plane and come out of the short tunnel off the field.

I said to Adams, "A quarter'll bet you the first one off 1405 has the babe waiting for him."

"You're on." Red grinned.

The babe was down below us at the fence with the rest of them, standing out like Venus de Milo would in Brooklyn. Bare headed, in ermine, but beautiful!

When the plane door opened, the first person to scamper down the stairs was a fat little Levantine,

wearing a black Homburg, a black overcoat stretching at the seams, black trousers and shoes and carrying a black briefcase.

"Hell," I said, fishing in my pocket to find a quarter.

Red's grin broadened. "Maybe her sugar has corns," he suggested. "Maybe, he can't walk fast."

The rest of the passengers were descending the stair from the plane, I put thirty years on the picture I'd made up for the blonde's boy friend and tried to pick him out of the bunch.

Red said, "Here's your quarter back and another to match it. You could land in a cow pasture and hit clover."

I glanced down. The blonde had left the fence and joined the little fat man. They were hurrying around the corner of the building, the fat man holding onto her elbow, and she with her head bent down to his level so she could hear what he was saying.

Not very happy, I rubbed the two quarters together. Even though I'd won the bet, that couple didn't suit me. I'm romantic as hell by nature; that's why I'm a cop.

"Come on," I said, "I'll buy the coffee."

We left the flight deck, went back through the bar and restaurant, down the stairs and along the walk to the coffee shop. Across the parking area, pulled up at the little ticket house where you pay your way off the lot, was a big yellow

convertible blowing blue smoke between its fishtails. I noticed it because it's exactly the kind of car I'm going to own when I turn crooked and stash away the mint that'll be mine for blinding my good eye to bookies, floating crap games and fancy houses.

I told Red about my idea and he said it sounded like a good life and how did we start it while we were on the Airport Detail.

After coffee, we turned into the office maintained at the airport for the pleasure of the city police force. Three straight chairs, one bench, one desk lost from a fire sale, one table, two bare light bulbs and two telephones; some pleasure. I called headquarters. The other phone rang. Red picked it up, frowning as he listened. On my line Captain Tepple told me there had been an alert from the Feds and we could do them a favor keeping an eye on the outgoing flights, particularly those that would touch down at Vegas or Kansas City. I cradled the phone.

Red said, "Sewell wants us over at First Aid. They've brought in a woman off 1405. She's dead."

"Hell," I said. "Probably a heart attack. Nervous old biddies shouldn't fly."

"She sounded pretty excited."

"Sure," I agreed. "Ginny's a sweet kid but she's been too long on the aspirin and smelling salts brigade."

On the way to First Aid, I told

Red another idea I had for turning an honest million. I was going to open a house. The house I had in mind would be on a corner so it could have entrances on both streets, one for women, one for men. All I had to do was charge for making introductions. If the women brought their own negliges, I'd have no overhead at all.

Red asked if he could be personnel director — in charge of aptitude tests. That's the trouble with college bred cops, they all have dirty minds.

We arrived at First Aid.

Ginny Sewell let us in. In her white uniform and cap, she looked very nice. Because of the nature of her work, she didn't have to wear those awful, hygienic white hose or flat, practical shoes, so, she looked nice all over. She also looked scared.

"My gosh, I'm glad you're here!" she said.

Lieutenant Diminian of Airport Protection stood behind her in his blue Eisenhower jacket and beaked cap. "This is a bad one, boys."

"Let's see it," I said.

Ginny led the way into the second room. On the shiny metal, white sheeted table where the biddies usually get the full treatment with their smelling salts, lay the body of a woman. Hastily, I revised my opinion of the heart attack. She was tall, and slim, and reasonably young, somewhere between her mid-twenties and thirties. Hard to tell, exactly, because of the way her ash

blond hair was done and the overdose of make-up on her face. Above sleek black pumps, her legs were smooth and good and bare. From knees to neck, she was covered by her coat. Rich and expensive looking, alpaca, or camel hair, as racy in line as the girl under it.

"You're sure keeping her under wraps," I said.

"Oh," Ginny said, "you mean the coat."

"Better open it," Lieutenant Diminian suggested drily.

I moved forward to oblige. Her eyes were closed and she appeared to be sleeping.

"Some doll," Red offered over my shoulder.

Up in the rib cage under the left arm which was away from us, the coat was stained, a big, dark, wet stain. Ugly. She'd had her heart attack; only not from the inside.

I reached the fly of the coat nearest me and pulled it up. I felt like I was holding a hot potato and didn't know how to drop it. It was easy to see why they left the coat on her. It was all she had.

I saw something else, too. And, it made me think of the other tall blonde, waiting for Flight 1405, and how she could be in show business, and of the fat little swarthy man and how he could be in show business, too, the kind of show business that is the farthest shot from Sunday School. I finally got loose of the coat, folding it over her the way I had found it.

"O.K. Where are her clothes?"

Lieutenant Diminian licked his lips. "That's the lot of it. All she had on when they brought her in here."

"Who brought her?"

"Johnston, the co-pilot. He carried her."

"Where is he now?"

"He, and Miss Phillips, the stewardess, and Allen, the pilot on the flight, are having coffee. I told them they could. Told 'em to clam up, too, until they talked to you."

"She have a purse?"

"Not with her," Diminian told me. "A dead woman can't carry a purse."

"On the plane?"

Diminian shrugged. "Could be. I've had it buttoned up. It's waiting for you boys."

"I suppose we have a name for her, the flight roster?"

The lieutenant laughed without humor. "Smith," he said, "Nancy Smith."

"You said the plane's buttoned up. What about the baggage?"

Diminian shook his head. "You know how fast they work, Prouty. The baggage probably was off the ship before Jan Phillips discovered her passenger wasn't sleeping."

"O.K. So, it's time we stopped twenty questions for now." I turned to Adams. "You get down to the coffee bar and pick up the crew. Take 'em up to our office."

"Sure," Red said. He repeated their names and Diminian nodded.

"And Lieutenant . . ."

Diminian regarded me, at the same time unsnapping a flap on his jacket pocket and pulling out cigarettes.

"Until I get some help out here, I wonder if you'd lend me a hand. Get down to the baggage stall and see what's left from the Flight 1405 lot. Nancy Smith's, if we're lucky. Anything uncalled for, if we're not."

"Glad to oblige," said Diminian.

2.

After they left, I turned to the nurse. "Ginny, let's have a look in her coat pockets."

With her watching me, the inspection didn't take long. I laid the three items in a row along the edge of the table beside the dead girl. A half used package of cigarettes, a handkerchief, and a match folder.

Ginny's blue eyes searched mine earnestly. "Not much, is it, Sergeant?"

"Read the name on the match folder?"

"*The Doll Show*," Ginny read gold letters on a black cover, a gold nude lying along the top of them with one knee bent. I turned the cover over:

"FOR FUN
FOR FROLIC

14444 WEST LAS FLORES"

"Ever been there?" I asked Ginny.

She shook her head. "Where?"

"A clip and strip joint here in town."

Ginny got it quick. "But she flew in here on the Frisco plane."

"That's what I'm thinking, too."

"So?"

"They're matches she had on her, or, they're matches somebody gave her on the plane. Either way, it's interesting. A stripped stiff with matches from a strip joint."

"That's not very funny, Sergeant."

"It's the bare facts."

"You're not even very nice, are you?" She asked the question as a little girl might, very solemn and not kidding at all.

I wanted to grab that firm brown arm of hers and lead her around the table and point to the stain on the coat. I wanted to say, see, that's a nice coat, a lovely coat, and regardless of what she did to earn it, I'll bet just like you, or any other girl, she stood in front of a three way mirror and felt the coat warm and soft and brand new against her shoulders and said this is good, this is for me. I wanted to hold onto Ginny Sewell and pull the coat away from the body that had been Nancy Smith for better, for worse, for sin or salvation, so Ginny could see that nakedness and know that it had been beautiful, regardless of the use to which it had been put, and that an ugliness had destroyed it so that it was now no more than a broken doll, disregarded first by the murderer and only one brief eter-

nity later by the living thing that had been Nancy Smith, whoever she was.

But, that doesn't sound like a cop, or even the way a cop is supposed to think, so, I said, "No, Florence Nightingale, I'm not very nice and we'll leave the dead about whom I am not supposed to jest, and I'll use your phone."

In the outer room at First Aid, I dialed Headquarters and had the switchboard put me through to Homicide. Cantrell was on the other end, whiskey-hoarse from a hundred years on the night watch.

"Prouty," I said, "Airport Detail."

"Something for me?" The lieutenant sounded mournful. It was twenty miles from where he was sitting with chair tilted back and cigar in his mouth to where I was perched under the scornful eye of the lady with the lamp just back from the Crimea.

"Yeah, Lieutenant," I said, "I sure have." I gave it to him then, quick and light on the dead, physical details of death and person; quick and loud about the match cover from *The Doll Show*; quick and kind of suggesting about the blonde Venus who had waited and the swarthy little one she had waited for, throwing in the big yellow convertible as a free guess of my own.

Cantrell gave me hell for the hundred odds and ends I'd neglected to check before phoning, gave me hell for not calling him sooner, admitted

it would be worth while to send a couple of boys night-clubbing, and said he'd be on his way as soon as he could make a couple of calls on his own.

I put a hand on Ginny's shoulder and felt her stiffen under my fingertips. "I got to go talk to some people," I told her. "Try not to think too much about the girl in the other room, and keep the place locked until Homicide gets here."

She took her hand and removed mine from her shoulder. Her fingers were cold and steady. We weren't about to play pitty-pat. "What if I should have a patient, Sergeant?"

"Let her do without her free aspirin tablet," I said. "What you've got here is police business."

"A real nice guy, just like I always said, a real nice guy!"

"Now, you're joking me."

"I sure am."

Outside the door, I waited until I heard the latch click inside.

3.

On the way back to our four walls laughingly called an office, I thought about Nancy Smith. I wondered just how many women there were who under any circumstance would be frightened enough, nervy enough, or careless enough to slip into two shoes and one expensive coat, walk out into the night and catch a plane. From the look of Nancy Smith, the amount of make-up she was wearing, overdone but

carefully applied, the phony perfection of her hair-do, I ruled out any interrupted tumble in the hay. Also, I decided the professional call girl was out, a girl with the peculiar class that Nancy had would have a place to hole up closer to home than air distance anywhere. Guessing from the coat alone, she'd have a small fortune tied up in clothes and would hate to leave them behind. But wait a minute. Suppose that precious apartment was here in town and she had had her way paid north by a visiting fireman and there had been big trouble and naked as a jaybird our lovebird had flown home. That idea was good enough to make book on — except for one thing, one fellow, the swarthy little man in the black fedora.

I was thinking of how I'd like to tie the can on his tail when I got to our office and met the crew Red Adams had gathered. Diminian was there, too, and as I suspected, there had been no sign of any baggage belonging to our Nancy.

On the other hand, a very nice piece of baggage was our hostess, Miss Jan Phillips. I don't know what all they teach at those air hostess training schools, but I guess they must begin from the ground up: how to brush your shoes, how to straighten your hose, how to cross your legs, pull in your belt, raise a good chest, square a pair of shoulders, tilt a chin, wear a cap, and look a man straight in the eye.

Obviously, Jan Phillips had had a course in all these things and graduated cum laude. She also had graduated with brown eyes, skin like a new-peeled twig, and the kind of shiny brown hair with little red highlights designed to be stroked before open fireplaces.

I started with Miss Phillips.

"Do you have the passenger roster?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"May I see it please?"

She handed me the folder from the table beside her and I flipped it open. The cellophane ticket slots were crowded.

"Full load?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you be able to tell me, Miss Phillips, the name of the first passenger to disembark here at the airport, a small man dressed completely in black, carrying a black briefcase?"

Surprisingly, Miss Phillips smiled, "Oh yes, that's Mr. Markos, Karl Markos. He's one of our regulars."

"Regulars?"

"I mean he's on this flight once or twice a week. Sometimes, more often. You see, he has a business here and one of the same kind in San Francisco. This flight's most convenient to his rather unusual business hours."

"Do you know the nature of his business?"

"Oh yes. As a matter of fact, he's offered me a job if I ever get tired of flying." Jan Phillips smiled, her

eyes twinkling. "When he first told me what he wanted me to do, I thought he was being, well, fresh. You see, he told me he'd pay me twenty dollars a day for working ten minutes out of every half hour for five hours a night, six nights every week."

I did some quick mental arithmetic and came up with a hundred-and-twenty a week at four dollars an hour. "I don't see how offering you that kind of money is being fresh, Miss Phillips."

"Is it all right if I smoke?"

I got out my cigarettes. She thanked me, touching my hand lightly with the fingers she used to steady my match. Then, she said, "Karl Markos wanted me to spend those ten minutes each half hour standing in a box with my clothes off."

4.

"What?" I wasn't the only one startled. Johnston, the co-pilot, said, "My God!" Captain Allen, the pilot, and Lieutenant Diminian both stared at Miss Phillips as though they were seeing her for the first time. I even think Allen was astounded when he realized that under the blue uniform which clothed the girl was not some automatic part of the machine he flew, but a heart of gold beating out against a skin of satin. Even my side-kick, Red Adams, looked damned interested.

"Oh, I wouldn't be in the altogether," Jan said quickly. "I was supposed to wear a big red bow around my tummy with a couple of ribbons hanging down. Have you ever been to *The Doll Show*, Sergeant?"

"That's Karl Markos' business?" I demanded.

"Oh yes, didn't I say so?"

"No. You didn't."

"Then, you know *The Doll Show*?"

"Only by reputation," I said carefully. I was thinking of another naked girl who'd soon have a box all her own. Dead Nancy Smith with a match folder from *The Doll Show* in her pocket.

"You better tell me a little more about the job you were offered."

"It wasn't too bad," Miss Phillips said, "not for me, of course, but for a girl who has to make her living with nothing but a good figure and a pretty face. It is simply a variation on the mermaid in the fishbowl deal. The same thing, really, only in this case it's a doll box upon the back bar, a box about two feet high, all tied up like a birthday package with red ribbons on top, and most of the time with a real kewpie doll standing against what appears to be the tissue paper back of the box with the other three sides glass. Only, when the box is working, a turntable arrangement revolves the kewpie out of sight and a real live doll appears briefly, posed against a mirror."

"Two feet high?" Red asked. "How does she get in the box?"

Miss Phillips gave him her smile. "The girl's not truly in the box, Officer, she's in a replica of the box down under the back bar. A light, mirror and prism arrangement do the trick. Something like a drift-meter picking up a ground image from a plane."

"Some ground image!" That was from Johnston.

"O.K.," I said. "You certainly seem familiar with the whole arrangement for a girl who wasn't interested, Miss Phillips."

"Now really, Sergeant." Miss Phillips made a very pretty pretense of pouting. "I didn't say I wasn't interested in the details, only that I wasn't interested in posing in the nude. Believe me, the first time I was out to *The Doll Show* I took the grand tour."

"With Mr. Markos?"

"Of course. Also with Mrs. Markos, a very beautiful blonde who dances there under the name of Joy Rogers. Why Sergeant, you'd never believe those two could be wrapped up in a ten-year-old son!"

I thought about the blonde who had met him at the plane. I tried to put a son between them. I tried to make them a happy family of three. It didn't work. I said "I think we'd better move on to Miss Nancy Smith."

"Her!"

"Yes?"

Jan shrugged. That shrug brought

things into focus. I took a look around, a look at the lot of us because I saw suddenly that there were tiny beads of perspiration on the girl's lips, and the suggestion of circles under her brown eyes, and that all of us were punch drunk with tiredness. And I wondered what was keeping Cantrell, the homicide bunch, the lab crew. Hell, I was a cop on the Airport Detail, a sub pulled off the bench in the early minutes of the game, and I was ready for the showers.

I said, "Did you see any evidence tonight on the flight down that Nancy Smith and Karl Markos knew each other?"

"Oh, yes indeed, Sergeant. Miss Smith knew everyone."

"What do you mean by that?"

"What do I mean by that? I'll tell you what I mean. First, I mean Miss Smith looked drunk when she boarded the plane in San Francisco. Second, I mean she called me Sister Phillips. Third, she called Tommy, here," Jan pointed a thumb at Johnston, the co-pilot, "lover-boy. Mr. Markos was Karly-baby. Oh, Miss Smith was a very lovable person."

"So we'll forget the drunk and friendly act," I suggested, "and get down to facts. For one thing, Miss Phillips, did you have any idea that Miss Smith was not dressed, shall we say properly, underneath her coat?"

Jan found her own cigarettes and got another going. "She showed a

lot of leg, if that's what you mean. Good legs, considering her age," she added venomously.

"Very good legs," Tommy Johnston added as though he were tired of being quiet.

"I thought they were for you," Jan said. And just for a minute I was out of it and it was strictly between them.

I made a big fat note in my mental notebook and glanced at Adams. Red winked at me.

"Ah, honey . . ." Johnston began before he remembered and cut it off sharp.

That was one advantage to everybody being tired, they spoke sometimes before they thought. In murder, that adds up.

"Before this gets out of hand," I put in, "Where was Miss Smith sitting in relation to Karl Markos?"

"She was behind him," Jan told me.

"Remember their seat mates?"

"They had the single seats. They didn't have any. The double seats were on the other side of the aisle."

"From your roster," I asked, "can you give me a list of who was sitting behind them?"

"Nobody," Jan Phillips said instantly.

"The one thing that saved Miss Smith from being an embarrassing spectacle was that she was in the tail seat and Mr. Markos was directly ahead of her. Thank heavens, he was somebody I knew," she added fervently.

The door behind us swung open and I turned my head. Preceded by his cigar, Lieutenant Cantrell advanced into the room. Behind him were Golden and Shannon, also of Homicide. If I'd been French, I'd have stood, sung three choruses of the *Marseillaise*, and kissed them on both cheeks, all of them.

"Prouty, you got a place we can talk?"

"No, sir," I said to the lieutenant, "not if you want it private."

Lieutenant Diminian pushed himself off the corner of the table and stood, squaring his shoulders, pulling down the edges of his Eisenhower jacket as a woman might adjust her girdle after a double feature.

"Lieutenant Diminian," I said to Bill Cantrell, "Airport protection."

"How'r'yuh," Cantrell said.

"Nasty mess," offered the lieutenant. That boy had seen too many Ronald Colman pictures in his youth.

Cantrell ignored the succinct comment.

"The lieutenant's been most cooperative," I said. "He took care of the baggage."

"Let's take a walk," said Cantrell.

We left the party then, and I took the lieutenant down the walk and up the stairs to the flight deck outside the restaurant. We stood there under a predawn sky watching the planes and hearing the fine roar of the beast in their anxious engines.

"Prouty," said Cantrell, "you've got the makings of a good cop."

"Thanks."

"No, I mean it. The stuff you told me over the phone paid off. Maybe you wonder why I was so long getting here."

"Yes, Sir," I said, "I wondered."

"Well," Cantrell said, "tonight, you're the high muck-a-muck. I took time to send a radio car on to *The Doll Show*. I gave 'em a description of the little guy, the big blonde, the fancy convert. Your hunch paid off. We picked up Markos, he owns the joint."

"I know. Also one by the same name in Frisco."

"Good. That confirms why he was on the plane. Anyhow, you were smart spotting that briefcase. Know what he had in it?"

"You're doing the talking, Lieutenant."

Cantrell took a look at me, a long look from head to foot. "You're a good cop," he repeated. "You don't take any fancy fliers in the way of guessing. So, I'll tell you. There was a knife in the briefcase, a boy-scout knife with some nice gummy stuff that could be blood on the big blade."

"I'll be damned!"

"Said it was for his kid. Said the hostess on the plane gave it to him. Some youngster on a previous flight had left it. Can you beat that?"

"No," I said, "but you can check it. Miss Phillips, the chick we just walked out on, was the hostess."

The lieutenant nodded. "Nice to have the check. Not that we need it. Markos also had a purse in his bag, a sequin purse with five hundred bucks besides the usual woman stuff. No identification yet, but I don't doubt that the compact, the mirror, something will furnish the goods to latent prints."

"What's Markos say about that?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"He had no idea it was there. That's what he says."

"What about this Nancy Smith," I asked, "the nude in high heels and alpaca?"

"Like I'm telling you, Prouty, tonight you played it smart. You figured the whole show because you could add hair-do, makeup and how she used a razor on her body into a picture that made just one kind of sense. I phoned the Frisco police and asked straight off for Frissen on the Vice Squad." Bill Cantrell glanced at his watch. "A little over five hours ago, the boys up there moved in on the Alturian Club's Annual Stag Dinner and Smoker. The cop they sent to one of the dressing rooms off the alley was a rookie. When he opened the door on a stark naked woman, he blushed and closed it. The woman told him to wait until she slipped into something. What she slipped into was a coat and the alley. They're sending the rookie down here in the morning with a red woolen dress, a black garter belt and a pair of hose. Frissen

wants him to see for himself why modesty's no virtue when you're on a vice detail. If those clothes fit the stiff you've got for me, it ties up the case with no loose ends."

"It'll tie up," I said.

"You bet it will!" The lieutenant clapped me on the shoulder. "Right around Mr. Markos," he said, "Hell, he even admits he fired the girl from his club down here for showing her wares in that fancy little box of his and then coming on out to hustle a little business for herself between shows."

I should have felt fine. I didn't. I think I felt rather like one of Nancy Smith's between-shows customers after he had been left with a hot hand on the knee, a heavy promise and a considerably lighter wallet. And, as we walked back down the stairs away from the flight deck along the walk toward the office to tie up the loose odds and ends, I couldn't help thinking about the tall blonde in ermine, her funny little husband all set for a one way trip to "Q" and the ten-year-old son whom I couldn't even imagine.

6.

Homicide took over then. The lab crew had Diminian unbutton the plane so they could go to work on it. The medical examiner arrived and I took him to grouse at Ginny Sewell while he did a prelim on the remains of the late Nancy Smith. I wondered if the place she was now

was as hot stuff as the smoker she had run away from.

I could see that Sewell still had no desire to neck when we got off duty at five. On the way back to the office, I ran into Adams.

"Hey, Sarge," he said, "they don't need us plain, dumb cops now the bright boys are here. How about coffee?"

"O.K.," I said, "so it's your turn to buy."

"Let's have it upstairs in a booth."

The waitress brought our coffee and Red said, "You must feel pretty set up, picking the Markos boy out of thin air."

"I don't like it."

"Why?"

"It doesn't jell."

Red grinned. "Mind if I do a little deducting?"

"Go ahead."

"What do you think of this Jan Phillips?"

"Nice, real nice."

"Yeah, but let me ask you this. You ever meet one of these nice polite young ladies of the airways before who figured it was line of duty to tell you how nice she'd look, wearing just one red ribbon?"

"Wait a minute. She didn't say that, Markos did."

"She said he said." Red continued imperturbably. "Called him Karl, by the way."

"Why shouldn't she? Apparently they've made the flight together several times."

"Ever hear a hostess on duty get so familiar?"

"Frankly, I haven't heard too many hostesses on duty."

"Take my word for it, they don't. Warm friendliness, yes. Familiarity, no."

"You write the book?"

"I've read it. Remember that business about this Nancy Smith's legs?"

"Yeah. Miss Phillips said she had shown a lot of leg, and Johnston said they were very good legs, and she said she thought they had been shown for Johnston's benefit. Something on that order."

Red nodded. "That's the general idea. Two things you didn't mention. When she made the first remark about Nancy Smith showing her legs out under the coat, she said they were good legs, considering her age. And when things started to get hot, Johnston said, 'Ah, honey . . .'"

"So they're in love," I said.

"I'll get to that in a minute. First things first. That remark about the legs being good for her age."

"Being bitchy," I said.

"Sure, but how old would you say Nancy Smith was?"

"Twenty-five, thirty-five, those are the outside limits, close to thirty either way."

Adams called for more coffee. "So we're experts on age, you and I. Everyday, part of our take home pay comes from being on the lookout for a dame, age forty-two or

thirty-nine, a guy believed to be twenty-seven, or fifty-two. And we spot 'em. Yet this Nancy Smith has us licked, we've seen her stripped to the hilt and we still don't know whether she's twenty-five or thirty-five. So how does Miss Phillips know Nancy Smith has good legs for her age unless she knows her age?"

"She was being a bitch. She was in love and her guy had been looking at another woman's legs."

Adams shook his head and stared at me sadly. "Sometimes, Sergeant, you worry me."

"What the hell do you want me to think?"

"Think about this. Right off the bat when you ask Miss Phillips if this Nancy Smith knows Karl Markos, what does she say?"

"That she did."

"That's not the way she said it. With your permission, I will quote: 'Oh, yes indeed, Sergeant, Miss Smith knew everyone.' Then a minute later, 'I mean she called me Sister Phillips . . . she called Tommy . . .' meaning Johnston, 'lover boy. Mr. Markos was Karly-baby.' Get the significance?"

"Sure," I said, "Nancy Smith was loaded."

Red tapped the table in front of me with his forefinger. He ticked off his words with it like the beat of a metronome. "Maybe, maybe not, regardless of which, in setting up her own cover, Jan Phillips gave us the whole key to the murder of Nancy Smith."

"Holy heaven," I said, startled, "you're not intimidating the stewardess did the job?"

7.

"Listen, Sarge, let me explain. You played the facts. A guy hurried away from the plane early. The dead girl was a show girl, the kind of a girl more likely to appear without her clothes than with 'em. There was a match folder in her pocket from *The Doll Show*. It's easy, too easy. Murder doesn't work like that. It isn't that simple. You got to start with motive. You got to put yourself in the murderer's shoes."

"And that makes it Jan Phillips?"

"Could. Take a look at that one sentence. She called me Sister Phillips. That's what Jan Phillips said, and you thought Nancy Smith was being insulting and let it go at that. But what if Phillips was just trying to cover in advance the fact that other passengers may have heard Nancy Smith refer to her as *my kid sister*, or *Sis*? Think what it could mean having a sister aboard the plane on the run from a stag smoker, half-drunk and bare-back naked under a coat and showing a lot of leg to the co-pilot and anyone else who might care to look. That's what causes a person to kill, Sergeant. Loss of security, upsetting the old status quo. Add the fact that this sister is obviously a bitch on wheels, a nympho with her sights set on anything in pants, and for the

moment she's picked on sister's boy friend, the husky young co-pilot. There's motive like your Markos never dreamed of."

I didn't say anything. There was enough sense in what Red was saying so it was beginning to get under my skin. And if Karl Markos was innocent, I hated the idea I'd put him in jail, even if he was an oily bastard.

Red said, "Now we come to ways and means. We know how Miss Phillips got hold of the knife. A kid left it aboard on a previous flight. So, all she has to do is stab Nancy Smith before she gives the knife to Markos. A really easy trick considering what hostesses know about first aid and with nobody paying particular attention when a hostess leans over a passenger's seat. Then, there's the purse, the one piece of evidence that's really going to tie this Smith gal to Markos' tail. Who would have a better opportunity to slip something in his bag than the hostess?"

"I'll be damned," I said.

Red stared at my unhappy face and grinned. "Hell," he said, "so you made a mistake on your Markos hunch. You just took a dislike to him because he latched onto a dreamboat at the airport."

"There's still no proof on this Phillips thing," I said slowly.

"So we'll find it," Red said. "That gal likes to talk. She'll cross herself up saying too much when we throw a scare into her."

"Shove it over and I'll join you."

Lieutenant Cantrell was standing at the corner of the booth, Red and I slid around to make room. The lieutenant lowered his big bulk onto the seat I had been warming with all the grace of a sleepy bear.

A waitress came and Bill gave his order.

When she had departed, I said, "Lieutenant, I'm glad you're here. Adams has developed an idea on the case I think you should hear. He's built quite a case against Jan Phillips, the hostess. Of course, it'll take a lot of building, but . . ."

"Miss Phillips, eh?" Bill rumbled.

"Yes, sir," Red said quickly. "I got to worrying about the holes in the sergeant's evidence. You know, Lieutenant, the facts without a motive to substantiate them."

"And Miss Phillips has motives?"

"I believe they could be developed."

"You go ahead and develop them," Cantrell said to Red. "But don't bother me with 'em. I got a call ten minutes ago that Karl Markos has made a full confession. I'm going to have breakfast and then I'm going to bed."

8.

"There was a motive?" I couldn't help asking. Red had me filled to the brim with motive.

"Yeah, there was a motive." Bill bit the end of a cigar, picked it from his teeth and placed it in the ash

tray. "But it's no motive two flat-foots on the Airport Detail could unearth, or would be expected to. Markos broke because you used your head, Prouty, and reported what seemed to you a suspicious haste, and gave us a chance to pick him up before he took time to get rid of the knife and the purse. You see, his wife met him at the airport and he wanted to keep her out of it, so he planned on ditching the stuff after they got to the club."

We waited until the lieutenant got his cigar alight. I tried to keep from looking like I had swallowed the canary because of the expression on Red's face.

Cantrell said sarcastically, "I'm going to tell you the motive because Red, here, is an educated cop. He's a big psychology man making the old college try, B.S.S.O.B. Nancy Smith, known professionally as Sherry Crystal, was also known privately as Mrs. Karl Markos, the first. She's the mother of Markos' kid. Markos has married three other show girls in the nine years they have been divorced. She was making life hell for him and draining him of every nickel he could raise. She kept threatening his custody of the kid, and while she was thoroughly rotten herself, his own moral grounds were pretty shaky. The only good thing you can say for Markos is he did love his son.

"On the plane tonight, he discovered his wife, traveling under a phony name, and as even he had

opportunity to discover, without any clothes but her shoes and coat. When the airline hostess came up out of a clear blue sky and handed him a boyscout knife, it was like a sign from heaven."

9.

That was the end of the night. It was five in the morning when I went out to the parking lot and picked up my coupe. As I swung onto the highway, I saw Florence Nightingale standing at the bus stop without her lamp. I pulled into the curb.

"Going my way?"

Ginny Sewell came over to the car and I swung open the door.

She slid onto the seat without speaking.

"Even if I'm not very nice, can I take you to breakfast before I drive you home?"

"You're taking advantage of a hungry girl," she said.

"That's me." I agreed, "A wolf behind a badge of honor."

Ginny moved over until her shoulder was against mine. I shifted gears and we started ahead down the road. It felt good having her there.



Portrait of a Killer

No. 9 — Theodore Durrant

BY DAN SONTUP

HE LOOKED harmless enough. He was what the old folks would call a "refined young man," the kind that would never even think about making a pass at a girl. But that's where Theodore Durrant fooled everyone. He not only thought about making passes at girls, but, within the space of nine days, two really beautiful women were murdered — and nice, quiet, refined young Theodore had strangled both of them with his own hands.

The first to go was Blanche Lamont. At twenty-one, she had the kind of full, rounded figure that made men's eyes move quickly up and down whenever she passed. Theodore, of course, had more time to look her over. They were dating together in San Francisco, and while Theodore generally behaved himself, he did get out of hand once on a walk through Golden Gate Park with Blanche. Nothing much happened, and Blanche handled the situation competently. But she did punish Theodore by refusing to go out with him for a few weeks after that.

If she had thought about it, Blanche might have considered this little episode a warning of some

kind. There had been rumors floating around their crowd that Theodore had acted up once before with another girl — this time in a church. Being an assistant Sunday School superintendent, Theodore had a key to the church, and the gossip had it that he had taken the girl into the empty church, left her in one room while he went out for a while, and then returned to her without a stitch of clothing on him. The girl, of course, took one quick look and then ran.

Nobody could prove any of this, though, and Blanche didn't pay much attention to it. From her dates with Theodore, she was sure that the shy, quiet boy was as innocent of women as she was of men.

She found out differently the afternoon Theodore talked her into going to the church with him.

No one knows what excuse Theodore gave her to get her into the church, but there were plenty of witnesses who saw them going there. It's clear that Theodore never planned the murder of Blanche, that no matter what else was on his mind, the thought of killing Blanche never entered his head. He met her in broad daylight, they passed people

both of them knew, and they went straight into the church without trying to hide the fact. Everything was open and aboveboard, and, if Theodore were planning murder, he certainly would have been more careful about it.

It's pretty obvious what happened once the two of them got inside the church. There's no doubt that Blanche refused to give in — and that's when Theodore, probably wild with frustration, grabbed her by the throat and squeezed his hands together and held on until Blanche stopped breathing.

After this, he dragged her by the hair up the stairs inside the church and then kept on going until he reached the belfry tower. There, he stretched Blanche out on the floor and then ripped every shred of clothing off her body. He stuffed the clothing in between the beams of the tower, and then, kneeling down by the body, he reverently crossed Blanche's hands over her chest.

He left the church without touching her again.

No one went up to the belfry tower after that, and so Blanche's body remained undiscovered until Theodore brought another girl to the church.

The second girl was Minnie Williams, just as beautiful as Blanche was, but a little less proper. Minnie was a maid, and she knew both Theodore and Blanche. Less than a day after he had murdered Blanche,

Theodore looked up Minnie and made a date with her. They went out together, had a pleasant evening, and then, a few evenings later, Theodore asked Minnie to go to the church with him.

Minnie, of course, knew about the disappearance of Blanche by this time, and she might have even suspected that Theodore had something to do with it. It's certain they discussed it together, because Minnie hinted at this to some of her friends. However, either her suspicions weren't strong enough, or else she was curious enough to find out more — or she might just have been pleased at Theodore's invitation to go into the empty church. In any event, she accepted.

Once again, Theodore didn't bother to cover up his actions. Plenty of people knew that the two of them were meeting that night; others saw them together; and one man even watched both of them go into the church together. He also saw Theodore come out alone later on but attached no importance to it, thinking that other people were in the church at the time and that Minnie had remained behind with them.

Theodore made out a lot better with Minnie than he had with Blanche. Medical evidence proved that later on. It also proved that Minnie was still alive when Theodore ripped the clothes off her and shoved pieces of her dress into her mouth with such force that some of

them were later found lodged in her throat. It's certain that Minnie put up a terrific struggle and tried to scream, but she couldn't do anything against Theodore. While Minnie was still struggling with the pieces of dress in her mouth, Theodore drew a knife and slashed away at her head, her arms, her hands, and her body.

He didn't treat her as reverently as he had Blanche. He left Minnie lying there in the room and just walked out of the church.

Later that night, Theodore went to a church meeting at one of the members' home as though nothing had happened.

The next day, Minnie's body was

discovered, and the police were called. A routine search of the church disclosed Blanche's body in the belfry tower — and that's when all the witnesses came forward and told of seeing Theodore with both young women.

He was arrested, said he was completely innocent of either crime, and kept on protesting his innocence all the way through his trial. A lot of people were convinced by him, but not the jury. Theodore was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.

He died, still claiming that he hadn't killed the girls, and still looking very much the "refined young man."



It's hell to be an addict. But Joey knew he wasn't — he just liked the stuff.

... or leave it alone

BY EVAN HUNTER



IT WAS very hot up there on the roof. The sun was just a hazy ball of yellow in the sky, and it shone down on the slick tar of the roof, and it glanced off the skylight, and reflected from the badges on the chests of the two bulls.

The second bull was leaning over the brick wall on the edge of the roof and looking down into the courtyard. He had a very fat backside, and the blue of his uniform stretched tight over his wide, abundant buttocks. The first bull was

fat, too, but not so much so as the second one was. He held my elbow in one beefy paw, and then he said, "All right, cokie, what'd you do with it?"

"What'd I do with what?" I said.

"The syringe and the package. We know you had it, pal. You dump it over the roof there?"

"I don't know what you mean by no syringe," I said. "You use a syringe for enemas, don't you?"

The second bull came back and said, "He's a wise guy, Tommy. He's one of the wise guy type."

Tommy nodded and clenched his fists. "You just keep on being wise," he told me. "You just keep doing that. We know you're on it, son, and all we got to do is catch you. You get booked for possession then."

"Possession of what?" I asked.

"I told you," the second bull said. "He's just a wise guy."

"You high now?" Tommy asked, studying me shrewdly.

"I don't know what you mean by high."

"He don't know what we mean by high," the second bull mimicked.

"You guys come around talking about syringes and highs, and I'm just in the dark here. You guys speak any English at all?" I said.

"They speak English downtown," Tommy said. "You'll find out the first time we cop you with a package of H."

"What's H?" I asked.

"Come on, we're wasting our

time," the second bull said. "He dumped the junk and the works."

"Man, you guys sure talk foreign," I said.

Tommy shook his head sadly. "You don't know the road you're on, kid. It's a shame."

"Yeah, I bleed for him," the second bull said.

"I'm bleeding, too," I told them. "From that goddamned sun."

"Keep your nose clean, cokie," Tommy said. "Remember, we catch you with a bindle, and you'll go cold turkey behind bars."

"Don't con me, cop," I said. "They'll give me the Lexington choice."

"You all of a sudden understand foreign languages, huh, kid?" the second bull said.

"You find any H, cop?" I asked. "You got anything to pin on me? If you haven't, why don't you go blow your whistle at traffic a little?" "You goddamn addicts . . ." he started.

"What's an addict?" I asked innocently.

The second bull said, "Argh," and drew back his hand like he was going to slap me across the face. Tommy grabbed him and said, "Come on. Let the bastard stew in his own juice."

I watched them open the metal door to the roof, and then head down to the street. I looked over the brick ledge until I saw them pile into their whitetop, and then I went over to the courtyard side and

looked down. The syringe lay against the brick wall, all the way down there, and the bull must have been cockeyed to have missed it. Somewhere down there, too, the bindle of heroin was lying on the concrete, waiting for old Papa Joey. I thought about the bindle, and my palms began to sweat a little, and then I told myself, *Man, stop acting like you're hooked or something.*

I walked back to the street side of the roof, peeked over, and saw the patrol car pulling out into the traffic. I smiled, and then went to the metal door, and then down the steps to the first floor of the building. When I got there, I knocked on apartment 11, and I waited.

"Who is it?" she called.

"Me. Joey."

"What you want, kid?" she asked.

"Open up, Annie. For Christ's sake, open up."

I heard her footsteps shuffle over to the door, and then the door opened and Annie was standing in it, holding a silk wrapper around her. She held the wrapper tight, but it still flopped open in the front and Annie's long legs showed through, and above her waist the breasts were white like cream where the silk didn't cover them.

"What's up, Joey?" she asked. She was a blonde, Annie, and she had green eyes, and her eyes told me she was hopped to the ears, and I wanted to be that way, too.

"Let me in," I said. "The Law's on the scene."

She stepped back without another word, and then slammed the door and locked it when I was inside.

"You swingin', sister?" I asked.

She looked at me with that glazed look in her eyes, and she was almost beginning to nod just standing there. She didn't need to answer me because it was written all over her face. "The swingin'est, man," she said.

"You were hungry last night," I said. "Where'd you score?"

"I scored," she told me sleepily. "What do I have to do, report everything to you?"

"You don't have to report nothin' to me," I said. "Nothin' at all."

"You ain't kidding, mister."

She stretched out on the bed, her legs widespread, the wrapper under her like a silken sheet. She began to nod, so I shook her and said, "Which one of these windows opens on the courtyard?"

"Why?"

"I got a bindle. Come on, Annie, look alive."

"Window near the dresser," she said. "What do you mean, you got a bindle? Out there in the courtyard, you mean?"

I was already over to the window. I opened it and then looked down into the courtyard, spotting the syringe over near the wall. It was about a ten foot drop to the concrete below, and a barred sewer grating was just under the window.

I'd have to jump clear of the grating, and I'd probably need Annie's help to get back up again.

"You give me a hand on the way back," I said, "and we'll divvy the junk. Okay?"

I looked over to where Annie lay on the bed. She was really beginning to nod now, so I yelled, "Hey, hop-head!" and her eyes popped open. She looked at me and I said, "Okay?"

"Yeah," she said drowsily. "Sure, okay," and then she fell back on the pillows and I got ready to jump. I should have hung from the window ledge, but I didn't think of that. I just dropped down, and I guess maybe I was too anxious to get at that bundle and syringe. Anyway, I didn't miss the grating.

My foot hit it flat, right between two of the bars, and my ankle hit the concrete wall of the sewer, and I dropped clear down to my crotch, almost tearing myself in two.

At first, the pain was so great that I couldn't move. I just crouched there with my mouth open and the fires dancing in my groin. I couldn't have yelled if I wanted to. And then after a while the pain in my groin went away, and there was another pain, in my leg this time. I tried to get out of the grating, but my leg felt like it was ready to fall off.

I looked down into the sewer, and I almost puked when I saw my leg. It was twisted at a funny angle, and the bone had pushed through my pants leg, and a lot of blood was already staining the wool.

"Annie!" I yelled. "Hey, Annie!"

I waited for a few minutes, and then I yelled, "Annie!" again. She didn't answer. I remembered that she'd just shot up, and that she was nodding, and I wondered how much of a shot she'd taken and how long she'd be out.

"Annie!" I yelled once more, and then I shut up because I didn't want to bring anyone else to the windows. I could see the syringe off in the corner against the brick wall, and a couple of feet away from it, the package of heroin. Annie was on the stuff, but the rest of the people in this dump were from nowhere. If they spotted me with my leg all bass-ackwards, they'd call the bulls. And if the bulls came, they'd find the syringe and the H, and goodbye Joey.

There was nothing to do but wait until Annie came around.

It wouldn't have been so bad if the leg didn't start hurting so much. That, and the syringe just a few feet away against the wall. I tried to reach over for the syringe, but the leg protested whenever I moved. I couldn't get the leg out of the grating without snagging the broken bone on the bars, and I couldn't get up enough energy to move it anyway.

I needed a pain killer, and there was a bundle of the stuff just about three feet from where I was caught. There was a hypo with a needle about a foot beyond that, and I

couldn't get to either of them.

It was a good thing I wasn't hooked on the stuff. I'd been on H for six months now, and that was all. A little mootah before that, but everyone knows mootah ain't habit forming. I know guys who smoke marijuana down to roaches every night before supper, just like taking a cocktail. The law makes it a menace, but what The Law don't know ain't funny, believe me. I popped off on H because I liked the stuff, and that was it. I mean, man, you can take an addict or you can take a guy who just does it for kicks, and there's yards of difference. Now Annie was hooked, clear through the bag and back again. She'd been on the stuff so long, she had it for breakfast, dinner, supper, and between-meals snacks. Annie was different. She'd used up a double set of tread marks on one leg, and was already starting the retread on her second leg. That's what you call a fiend, man, and that was not me. Annie was the kind, you got her in bed she didn't know what the hell was going on. All she thought about was the needle, but not me. Me, it was kicks, pure and simple. I could have dropped H any time you said, dropped it like a diseased bindle — but I didn't want to. Not when it was so much fun.

So that part didn't bother me too much, the H being so close, I mean. If I was an addict, it would have been different, it being so close, I mean. I just wanted it now to kill

the pain in my leg because the pain was a godawful sonofabitch and Christ knew when Annie would see the light of day again.

The bleeding stopped after I reached down through the bars and tied a tourniquet with my handkerchief. It was cool down in the courtyard, and that was one thing to be grateful for. That sun up on the roof had been terrific, what I mean, hot!

I began to curse the bulls for ganging up on me, forcing me to beat up to the roof and dump the junk. If it hadn't been for them, I wouldn't have been forced to jump from Annie's window to get the stuff. It was a good bindle too, and I'd got it from Harry the Horse, and Harry knew heroin like he knew his own backside. He'd done three stints at Lexington, and each time they told him he was cured, he'd come out and hopped on the merry-go-round the very next day. You could always score with Harry. He was a real fiend, an addict, you know, and he knew what a guy was going through when he was sick. So all you had to do was hold your stomach and maybe vomit a little in front of Harry, and he'd lay a bindle on you gratis. Which was nice, and you could always depend on Harry's junk being good.

The bindle laying there on the concrete was good for at least two pops, and I really needed the junk now because of the leg. I sat there cursing the leg and watching the

glint of the syringe in the corner. I wasn't sick for the stuff, you understand, but I'd planned on shooting up, and then the goddamned bulls had come along. And now my leg was busted, and all because of the bulls.

I don't know how long the kid was sitting at the window, but I noticed him just then, and he gave me a scare sitting there like that just staring at me. The window was across the courtyard from Annie's, and the kid was no more than five years old, with stringy blond hair and big blue eyes. He kept eyeballing me through the closed window, and I smiled at him and said, "Open the window, kid."

He couldn't hear me. He kept looking at me as if I was some goddamn animal in the zoo. I made a lifting motion with my hands, and he finally caught on, and pulled up the window, and kept looking at me.

"Your mother home, kid?" I asked.

He shook his head, but he didn't say anything.

"Your daddy?"

Again he shook his head.

"You all alone, kid?"

"Yes," he said. "They went t'the store."

"Good, good. Look, kid, you want some candy?"

"No," he said.

"What do you want, kid? Ice cream? A ball? A kite? What do you want?"

"Nothin'," he said.

"Look, kid, you see that thing in the corner there? That thing with the needle on it."

"Yeah," the kid said.

"You see that door there in the wall, kid? That must lead to the basement. You want to go down to the basement and bring that needle to me?"

"No," he said.

I bit my lip and said, "What's your name, sonny?"

"Mike."

"Well look, Mike, you bring me that needle and that little envelope there, and I'll buy you a big bag of candy. How's that, Mike?"

"I don't want no candy."

"What do you want? I'll buy whatever you want."

"'Lectric trains," he said.

"Fine, I'll get you those. Just go down to the basement and come get me that needle and . . ."

"I can't," the kid said.

"Why not? For Christ's sake, I'll buy you the goddamned trains, I told you. Come on, kid." I cursed myself for not having realized there was a basement door leading to the courtyard. If I'd known that, I wouldn't have had to jump from Annie's window. Now this stupid sonofabitch kid was playing hard to get. "What do you say, Mike?"

"My mother told me to stay here," he said.

"I'll explain to her when she gets back. Come on, kid. Just go outside and look for the basement door, and

then go down there and open the door that leads to the courtyard. Okay, Mike?"

"No," Mike said.

"Why not, you little bastard? Why the hell . . ."

"That's cursing," Mike said. "My mother says that's cursing."

I shut up for a minute and thought. "Look, Mike, I got another idea. You don't have to go down to the basement. You're afraid to go down the basement, is that it?"

"No," Mike said.

"Look, just go around and knock on apartment 11. That's on the other end of the hall, Mike. Just knock there and ask for Annie, and tell her I'm down here, will you, Mike? How about it, Mike? Then I'll buy you the trains."

"My mother told me to stay here," he said.

"Why? What harm will it do . . ."

"I got a cold," Mike said. "I ain't allowed out of the house 'til I'm better."

"You don't have to leave the building, Mike. You just go around the hallway, all inside the building, and knock on apartment 11. You won't be disobeying your mother."

"I can't," Mike said. "I got to stay here."

"You little sonofabitch. If I get out of this . . ."

I heard a door slam, and I shut up quick. Then a woman's voice shouted, "Mike! What are you doing near that window?"

I tried to flatten myself against the wall, and then I saw a hand grab Mike's arm and yank him away from the window. The woman slammed the window shut without looking out into the courtyard, and I wondered if Mike would tell her about me. I hoped he wouldn't because that was the next step to bulls on the scene, and I didn't yearn for a possessions charge.

I wished I hadn't hocked my watch two months ago because I wanted to know what time it was. Two months ago, though, I'd needed a bindle bad, and Harry the Horse was in Lex, and I couldn't depend on a score with him. I'd tried a purse snatch, but the old lady began screaming, so I finally had to hock the watch, and it was a damned nice watch, too.

I figured it for pretty late because the bulls had clamped onto me about three, and then by the time they fooled around up on the roof, another half hour was shot. Figure another half hour down in this goddamned courtyard. Maybe four o'clock, by now. It was still September, so maybe I could count on light for another three hours at the most.

But how long would Annie stay in fogland?

That was the big question.

And how long could I take the pain in my leg?

I looked over at the syringe again, and I got that funny feeling in my stomach, the feeling I always got

just before popping off. I could imagine how it must have been with addicts. I just did it for kicks, and even I got that feeling just before I rammed the needle into my arm. I thought of sinking that needle into flesh now, sinking it right into that popping blue vein, and then kicking the H, pulling it into the syringe mixed with blood, and then shooting it back into the vein, kicking it again and again and again.

I began to sweat a little. My leg was pretty swollen now, and the dried blood had made my pants leg stiff. I couldn't feel anything at all below the knee on that leg, except the goddamned pain. I began to think I was lucky not having hurt myself worse, falling up to my crotch the way I did. I tried reaching over for the bindle of H, but the movement made my leg hurt like hell, and I couldn't reach it anyway, even if I could have crawled halfway out of the grating.

I thought about how simple it would have been if the bulls hadn't screwed up the works. I'd have looked up Perry, and maybe shared the bindle with him, or maybe even dropped in to Annie's pad, and shared the bindle and a few other things with her, even though she was dead from the neck down when it came to fish. Still, who said she had to enjoy it? There was one cat in this world who meant beans to Joey Angeli — and that was Joey Angeli. And even if she lay there like she was some goddamn corpse,

she was still built like a plastic latrine and better than most who wiggled and shook. I began thinking of Annie and her body, and that slow, sleepy look in her eyes, and the way her lips parted when she took the needle.

I began thinking of that, and after a while the pain in my leg stopped, and there was just a numbness below my knee, like as if I had no leg at all there. Just a numbness and a big throbbing that went clear up to my skull. The throbbing had a nice beat to it, a *thrum-thrum*, and I kept listening to the beat and watching the syringe with its sharp pointed needle off in the corner, and I guess I must have dozed.

It was dark when I woke up. There were lights in the windows all around the courtyard, like candles in a church. I looked up to Annie's window, and it was dark. And then I saw that it was closed.

Closed.

Somebody had closed the goddamn window while I was asleep. Annie had probably come out of it, and left the apartment to try to score again. I cursed myself for a stupid bastard, falling asleep like that when I should have kept watching and listening for Annie. Now she was gone, and I was alone in this damned courtyard, with the darkness all around me, and a leg that felt like it was cut off at the knee. I looked down at the leg to make sure it was still there.

With Annie's light out, the sewer grating was in darkness, and I was grateful for that, at least, because then no one could see me from upstairs. A big shaft of light fell on the syringe in the corner, and I looked at the syringe and wet my lips. The leg didn't hurt at all now, except for the throbbing and the numbness, but there was another hurt inside me, and I realized it had been a hell of a long time since I'd had my last fix. Too long a time. I'd popped off at about noon, but only with a single cap, and stuff that hadn't been too good anyway, which is the trouble when you get it from a guy you don't know. I'd been hungry, though, and Sam had told me The Man was on the scene, so I'd looked him up. I'd had to hock my portable radio to get the cap in the first place, and when it didn't really stone me, I was ready to strangle the greasy bastard who'd hung it on me. Later, when I'd hit Harry the Horse for a free ride, I forgot all about the dragass pusher, and I was really ready to snap my cork when the goddamn bulls pulled up.

So it had been since twelve o'clock, and Christ alone knew what time it was now. By the sweat on my forehead, it was pretty damned late. By the trembling of my hands, and the tight knot in my stomach, and the tic that was beginning on the side of my mouth, and the itchy feeling on my back, it was pretty damned late. The monkey

was beginning to scratch, all right, the monkey was. Twenty-five pounds he weighed, and he was on my shoulder and clawing away, and the only way to shake that monkey was with that bindle of H right there on the concrete, that bindle and the needle off there in the corner, its sharp end glinting in the beam of light.

If I was an addict, I'd have gone crazy watching that sweet stuff so close and not able to get at it. I began to feel a little sick in my stomach, and then I started to sweat more freely, with the hot sticky perspiration trickling down over my jaw and my neck and down my back. I couldn't sit still, but I couldn't move too much because my leg felt like lead down there in the sewer. I began to scratch my back, and my face, and I felt itchy all over, and the thing in my stomach began to twist and roil, and finally I couldn't take it anymore, and the sickness bubbled foully out of my mouth, all over the sewer grating and all over my pants leg, and the stench of it made me sick all over again, only this time there was nothing left in my stomach and I heaved drily while the shivers and the sweat mingled and made me feel like a joker with malaria.

It passed after a while, the way it always passed. I knew it wasn't gone forever, though, because that monkey was still on my shoulder and scratching away, and my teeth were clacking together. I tried to hold

my jaw steady but I couldn't control the sonofabitch, and I thought the noise of my teeth would bring everybody in the building to the windows, and all the while I thanked God I wasn't an addict because then it would really have been bad.

I tried to gather some strength. I leaned back against the wall, with my leg so swollen now it couldn't have fit through the bars of the grating. I lay back against the wall and I looked up at the lighted windows, with the shades all drawn now, and I could see shadows dancing on the shades, like images in some hophead's dream, like the shadows I'd seen once when that fruit uptown had treated me to a blow at opium. That had been the craziest, man, that opium, only the fruit had owned yellowed teeth, and a skin like parchment, and I figured I'd stick to good old H, after that. Still, it had been the craziest, with sounds I'd never heard before, like Stan Kenton and Dizzy all wrapped up together blasting their horns and pounding their bongo drums, like that only better because all the sounds were clear and sharp, and I could make out the delicate tonguing of the trumpets and the low wailing of the trombones. And there'd been colors, as if they were dancing in time to the beat, fierce reds that splashed against my eyeballs, and violent purples and jagged yellows. That opium had been the wildest, man, better than the sniff of cocaine I'd had once, and even

better than the morph Harry the Horse had laid on me a long time ago.

I kept watching the shadows on the window shades, and then there was a shadow that wasn't a shadow. The window shade was up, and the girl stood before it. She was a tall girl, a dusky mulatto, with a slim, supple body, and a silk dress that tightened over the thrust of her breasts, flattened over the hard smoothness of her belly.

She reached down for the hem of her dress, and then pulled it over her head, and I leaned forward a little and watched her. The window was on the second floor, and I could see into it with no trouble at all. I lay in the darkness and watched, and I knew she couldn't see me, and that made me feel fine, like she was stripping down just for me and me alone.

She wore a pink slip, and the dusky tones of her body were soft against the silk. She pulled the slip over her head, and I watched her, watched the cones of her breasts tight in a nylon brassière, watched the padded hips and the pockmark of her navel, and the deep triangle of her womanhood sharp against the thin, sheer stuff of her panties.

She came to the window, and I was breathing hard now, and I watched her, waiting for her to take off the rest of her clothes, hoping she would, wanting to get free of that grating. She stood there for a long time, her breasts heaving

tightly every time she sucked in a breath of air. She looked straight at me, straight down into the darkness, her eyes right on me. I closed my own eyes so that the whites wouldn't show in the darkness, and when I opened them, the shade had been drawn, and there was only her shadow there, and the shadow of the brassiere as it left her hands, and the shadow of her knee lifting, lifting, as she stepped out of the panties.

I was sweating again, and that bitch up there had made me keenly aware of the needle off in the corner. I tried to get out of the sewer. I squeezed my leg up until the swelling caught tight between the bars, and then I threw myself face down on the concrete.

I reached out with my arm and my hand, grasping for the bundle of heroin. I could see the packet, could almost taste the sugar-cut white powder in that packet, could almost feel it flowing through my veins. But I couldn't touch it. My finger scrabbled at the concrete, but I couldn't reach it, and I began to curse under my breath, and then I shoved back against the wall again, exhausted.

I lay there breathing hard, looking up at the drawn shade where the bitch had stripped. I wondered if she saw me, and then I wondered why she stripped in front of an open window, and I made a note to look her up once I got out of this.

When the basement door opened,

I was still thinking of the broad. I heard the hinges creak, and fear spit and crackled up into my skull. There was a light behind the big man who stood in the doorway. He had broad shoulders and a massive chest, and his fists were clenched. He didn't hesitate at all. He closed the door behind him, and then walked right to where I was caught in the sewer.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello," I told him.

"You stuck here, huh?" he asked. "Junie saw you from the window. She says you were stuck here."

His face was a pale white in the darkness, his eyes blue, a thatch of red hair covering his head.

"You can't move, huh?" he said, and there was a smile on his face now, and I didn't like the smile or the tight way his eyes crinkled.

"Look," I said, "will you call a friend of mine? Apartment . . ."

"Maybe I should call the cops," he said, still smiling.

"No," I said quickly, hoarsely. "No, not the cops."

"You in trouble?"

"No. But no cops."

He smiled and reached down, cuffing me across the face.

"Hey, what the hell . . ."

"Shut up, kid. Shut up or you'll get more."

"Well, what's the idea . . ."

"Just shut up." He pulled my head back and slammed me down against the concrete, and then he began going through my pockets.

"Hey . . ."

"Shut up!" he said, slapping me again. "Where's your money?"

"I got none."

"Where is it, jerk?"

"What is this, a roll job? You got the wrong number, Mac. You . . ."

"How'd you get down here?"

"I jumped."

"Why?"

"I . . . never mind."

"You lose something down here?"

He looked at me steadily, sore because I wasn't carrying any ghelt. "Is that it? You lose something valuable down here?"

I didn't answer.

"So that's it, huh? Well now, let's see." He began roaming around the courtyard, looking over the concrete. I watched him, and I watched the syringe off in the corner, and I hoped he wouldn't find it. He edged over the concrete, and then he spotted the gleaming metal, and he said, "Well now. Well now. A goddamn hophead."

He picked up the syringe and held it on the palm of his hand, the needle sharp and pointed. "This what you come down after, Hoppy? This it?"

"Give me that syringe," I said tightly.

He laughed, and then said, "You got what goes with it?"

"No," I said shakily.

"That's down here, too, huh? Dumped it down here, huh? That's why you don't want the cops, huh?" He started looking around on the

concrete again, and it was just a few seconds before he found the bindle. "Well, well," he said. "Maybe this ain't such a bust after all. What'll this bring me? Five, ten?"

"Look," I said, "let me have it, huh? I . . . need it, believe me. I really need it. I'll . . . I'll pay you for it. I'll . . . I'll do anything."

"You need it, huh? You an addict, kid?"

"Hell, no," I said irritably.

"Then why you need it?"

"I just . . ."

"I'm going to peddle this snow," he said. "Then me and Junie can take in a show. You like Junie, kid? She tells me you peeped her stripping."

"Look, mister, please. Let me have that stuff and I'll . . ."

"Shut up!" he snapped. He took the syringe and brought it over to the brick wall, and then he stabbed at the brick with the needle, bending it, twisting it.

"Don't," I pleaded. "Don't! You're . . ."

He finished mangling the needle, and then he threw the syringe against the far wall of the courtyard, and I heard the glass shatter when it hit.

"Now I sell this," he said. "You know a hophead can use it?"

"You bastard," I said. "You dirty, rotten, filthy sonofabitch bast . . ."

He kicked me then, and I fell back against the concrete, still swearing at him. He walked to the basement

door, and light flooded the courtyard for an instant, and then the door slammed shut harshly, and he was gone with my heroin, and my syringe lay in a million pieces across the yard.

I began to cry, and when I stopped crying I began to vomit again, and I kept heaving drily until sunlight splashed into the courtyard again, and that was when Annie found me.

They had to saw the bars to get me out of the sewer, and the doctor put the leg in a splint and gave me a shot of something in case there was a chance of gangrene. When he was gone, I lay on the bed and watched Annie in her blue woolen dress, and I thought again of the red-headed guy and his broad Junie, and I wondered what luck he'd had selling the bindle.

He didn't seem to matter much now. Nothing seemed to matter a hell of a lot. Because Annie was holding a spoon in her hand, and the spoon was piled high with heroin, and the match under the spoon curled a small yellow flame, mixing the H with water.

"You been through something, Joey," she said.

"Ain't it the truth?" I told her, and I watched the pile of H dissolve, and I wet my lips. She pushed the air out of the syringe, and then

loaded it, and I watched the milky-white junk nudge the graduated marks on the glass cylinder.

"You want this, baby?" Annie asked.

"Do I want breathing?"

"Man," she said, "you're really hooked. Clear through the bag."

"Who me?" I said. "I can take it or leave it alone."

"After what you've been through, you should hate this stuff. You should want to spit on it whenever you see it. You're hooked, brother."

"Not me," I said. "I can ditch it whenever I get the urge."

"Why don't you, then?"

"What for?" I said. "What's the harm? Hey, you going to give me that?"

She brought the loaded syringe to the bed, and she shot me up the way only Annie knows how to shoot somebody up, kicking the drug into my vein until I thought my eyes would pop. I forgot all about the busted leg, and I forgot all about the courtyard. I thought only of the H pouring into those big fat veins, and all the while I was glad I wasn't really hooked because a guy with a habit is just nowhere.

And when I started nodding, I was already figuring where I could get the next fix, and wondering if Harry the Horse would be ripe for another score.



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Self Improvement

A minister in Waterbury, Conn., told police that an unidentified elderly man with a heavy beard had stolen his spectacles. Several hours later detectives found a man who fitted the general description, but the suspect was clean-shaven. When questioned at headquarters, the man admitted he had taken the glasses. "But," he added, "I shaved off my beard when I put on the glasses and saw how awful I looked."

Repeat Performance

In Minneapolis, Minn., a citizen told police that he had been held up twice in the same evening by the same thief. The second time the robber, in disgust, told him: "Why don't you go home?"

Meanest Thief

In Portsmouth, England, a 54-year-old laborer, William Ringrose, was arrested for stealing the bottle of a baby whose mother had parked its carriage outside a store. Ringrose was fined 10 pounds (\$28).

Bad Samaritans

When a car driven by Mrs. Margaret Graham, of Yakima, Wash., ran off the road into a ditch, a man

in a passing car stopped and asked if she were hurt. She said she was not. He then seized her purse containing \$45 and drove away.

And in Los Angeles, Carl Carstensen, a blind man, was helped across the street and to the door of his home by an unidentified woman. Then, he told police, the woman took his billfold from his pocket, removed \$53, replaced his wallet and drove away in an auto.

Flying Saucers

An attempt at murder in Carmi, Ill., was frustrated recently by flying crockery. Police said James Hicks pulled a gun in a candy store to shoot his wife. Paul McClellan, a customer, seized a plate and threw it at Hicks. Hicks again tried to aim, and McClellan hit him with another plate. The action continued until six shots were fired and six plates were broken. Hicks then tried to shoot McClellan, but his gun clicked on empty cartridges. Throwing the gun to the floor, Hicks said: "I give up."

Solo Flight

A two-seater Aeronca, stolen from Wayne, N. J., was found undamaged the following day in a swamp near the Teterboro airport, six miles away. Owners of the plane, Fred and Wilbur Yoke, told authorities there

was a new entry in the log when they recovered the ship. It read: "Never flew a plane before."

Valid Reason

Police in Grand Junction, Colo., decided not to file charges against the driver of a jeep who left the scene hurriedly after his vehicle collided with an auto. They explained that the driver was thrown out of the jeep by the impact, and slid some distance on the pavement, feet first. When he stood up, slightly bruised, his trousers fell off.

Where Was Watson

In Milford, Conn., Sherlock Holmes sought the assistance of city police after his car was stolen. The officers found the car abandoned several hours later.

Up And Down

Despite the fact that a Bluefield, W. Va., office building employee had been racing his vehicle erratically the greater part of an afternoon, a charge of drunken driving could not be filed by police. The city ordinance covering such a violation applied only to action upon the city streets — it said nothing about elevators.

Left, Left!

Raymond Adams, of Detroit, told police in Cleveland that he wasn't worried after a thief stole four sample cases from his parked car. Adams, a shoe salesman, said he

felt sure they'd turn up intact. The cases contained left shoes only.

Mission Field

Evangelist William Freeman had no sooner arrived in Phoenix, Ariz., then he decided the city needed a "sawdust trail." Before he could get his tent up, thieves stole his clothing, gasoline and tools.

Robbers Robbed

Ogden, Utah, police have reported the case of the safe crackers who frustrated themselves. They broke into a lumber company office and blew a safe shut. Company officials told Detective Warren Brustle that the safe was not locked, but the intruders didn't bother to determine that. Instead, they placed explosives near the door handle and the concussion jammed the works.

Confused Canines

Mrs. Mary Green in Cleveland, O., had a watchdog at her side when she surprised a burglar in her house. The dog stood by, wagging its tail, as the intruder struck the woman and robbed her of \$50. Mrs. Green screamed, and a man who lived next door appeared with a gun. The dog attacked the neighbor.

And in Whetstone, England, a man escaped from a police station and was chased by an officer. Another policeman released a police dog. The dog, however, went after the pursuing officer and caught him. The fugitive got away.

No Witnesses

Burglars who robbed John Seiverling's home in Baldwinsville, N. J., tried their best to commit a perfect crime. They stabbed the only eyewitness — a parrot.

Polygamy Permit

Arraigned on a charge of bigamy in Detroit, Clarence E. Gray, 28, readily admitted that he had married his second wife without divorcing his first. "But I didn't need a divorce," he said, producing a marriage license. "Look," he continued, "it says right here on the license, 'Void after two years.'"

Hole In One

A thief apparently building his private links made off with the turf, the hole cup, and the pin and flag from the eighth green of a golf course at Stockton, Calif. Several days later he returned and stole 50 feet of garden hose.

Makes His Mark

In Campbell River, B. C., authorities had no difficulty in filing charges of leaving the scene of an accident against Clement Brousseau. They said his car hit a utility pole so hard it left the imprint of his license plate.

Right at Home

Detective Robert Reed, of Oakland, Calif., searched all day, without success, for a safe stolen from a

florist shop. Then he went home and discovered that the thieves had dumped the safe in a vacant lot in front of his house.

Magic Murder

A woman in Saginaw, Mich., reported seeing a car headed toward Flint with a "bloody hand sticking out of a trunk." A dozen county sheriff's officers and state police cars joined in the chase. Finally a car was spotted with license numbers given by the woman and, sure enough, there was a bloody hand hanging from the trunk.

Officers asked the driver to identify himself. He said he was Herman Germain, a Detroit magician, who was engaged in giving safety lectures. When the officers opened the trunk lid, the rubber hand fell to the ground. Germain explained that he had packed his props in a hurry.

Destiny of Disaster

In Wellington, N. Z., William Butcher stole 44 pairs of trousers from a parked car. He found them to be unfinished and took them to a tailor to have them completed. When Butcher returned several days later to pick up the trousers, he found two detectives waiting for him. Of all the tailors in Wellington, Butcher had picked the owner of the trousers.

Nervy Thief

Simon Ceballos, of Crookston, Minn., had his car stolen while he

was in it. The 55-year-old farm laborer was asleep in the back seat when the thief drove away with it. About an hour later, along a country road, the brazen thief awakened Ceballos and asked him to help fix a flat tire. As soon as the astonished car owner sized up the situation, he ran to a nearby farmhouse for help. The thief drove away without changing the flat tire.

Lawyers Last

A survey made by members of the Legal Aid Foundation in Los Angeles revealed that the majority of persons in trouble seek legal advice first from bartenders, from notary publics next, and from attorneys last of all.

He Didn't

When Pvt. George Looke Twice, a South Dakota Indian soldier, hailed a taxi in Franklin, Ind., he failed to live up to his name. He was fined \$13 for public intoxication after receiving a free ride to the

city jail. The taxi was a police car.

Final Touch

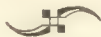
Thieves in Edmonton, B. C., Can., broke into a warehouse, blew open a safe, and fled with \$600. A month later the warehouse owner got a bill and learned that the safe-crackers had purchased their tools at a department store and charged them to him.

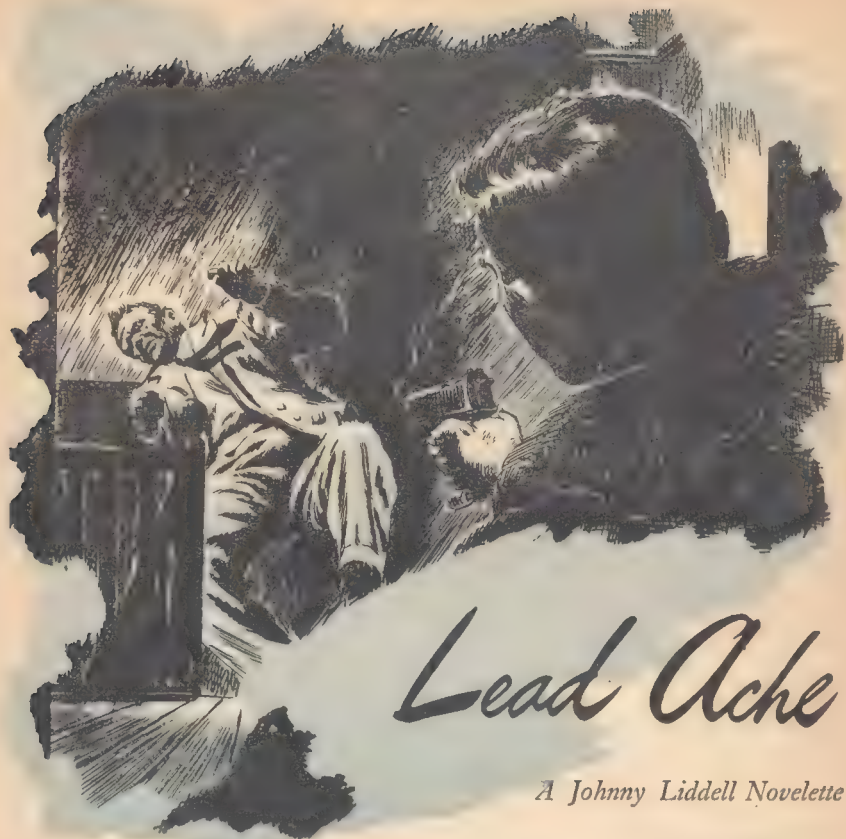
Puzzle Dept.

In Colorado Springs, Colo., David Brown removed the engine from his car, carried it to the basement of his home, and started making repairs. An hour later he went out to his engineless car. It had been stolen.

Unnamely

The Church of the Open Door in Denver, Colo., was robbed of \$220. R. E. Bond, treasurer, said all of the doors were locked, however, and the intruder entered through a window.





Lead Ache

A Johnny Liddell Novelette

BY FRANK KANE

"You can't kill a reporter," Larry said. But Liddell found somebody trying very hard to disprove that.

THE BIG CAR swayed as it rocked down the narrow concrete road. Its headlights groped for, finally picked out the entrance to a dirt path that meandered off to the right through a clump of trees.

The driver swung the car off the state road, and the hum of the tread of the concrete was replaced by the squash of the soft mud as it sucked at the tires.

Larry Jensen sat huddled in his

corner of the back seat, squinted through the darkness at the man who sat next to him. His eyes dropped from Madden's face to the metallic glint of the .45 he held cradled in his lap.

"Where are we going, Lew?" Jensen hoped the other man couldn't hear the pounding of blood being trip-hammered through his brain by the loud beating of his heart.

"What's the difference where you're going? You're not coming back."

Jensen licked his lips, made a stab at sounding unimpressed, didn't even fool himself. "You're bluffing. You couldn't get away with it."

Madden grunted, dug into his pocket, came up with a cigarette and hung it from the corner of his mouth. He snapped on a lighter, held it to the cigarette. In the light of its flickering flame, his black-button eyes squinted at Jensen. His face was thin, pinched. A scar that ran down the side of his cheek to the corner of his mouth lifted the end of his lip in a perpetual snarl. "You mean you're going to stop me?" He snapped the lighter off, blew a stream of smoke into the other man's face. "You newspaper guys don't know when you've had it, do you?"

"You can't kill a reporter, Madden. You should know that."

"Hear that, Maury?" Madden called up to the driver. "What happens when I empty this gun in your belly, sucker? You figure to get up

and walk home?" He roared at his own joke, was joined by the man in the front seat.

"If you think the expose will stop when you knock me off, you're crazy," Jensen lied desperately. "I left all the evidence in a safe place. They'll pick up where I left off and bust the racket wide open."

"And what'll we be doing all that time? Standing by and letting them?" Madden leaned over, jabbing the muzzle of the .45 into the reporter's side. "When they find you, they'll get the idea. And if they're hard to convince, we'll keep convincing them. Until they do lay off." He grinned. "Can't kill a reporter, huh?"

"Maybe you'll get a couple of us," Jensen said. "But don't get the idea that'll stop them. The ones that're left won't stop until they strap you into the hot seat."

The big car slowed to a stop. The man in the front seat swung around. "We're here, Madden."

The gun prodded Jensen in the ribs. "This is where you get off," Madden told him.

Jensen felt his knees turning to water, struggled to get them under control. "That's all I have to say," he finished.

"You never said a truer word, pal," the driver said.

Madden motioned for the reporter to open the car door, shoved him out. Jensen stumbled, fell to his knees in the mud. Madden stepped out, grinned down at him.

"Just to show you I'm a right guy, I might give you a break at that."

"I'm not asking for any breaks from you." Jensen's white face glinted damply in the half-light.

"How do you like that, Maury?" Madden asked the driver. "I want to give the guy a break, he gets nasty." He looked back to Jensen. "I'm going to let you run for it. It figures, a guy with a lot of wind like you might even outrun a slug."

Jensen pulled himself to his feet. "I'm not running. Anything I'm getting, I'll take now. It should be a new experience for a rat like you not to plug a guy in the back."

The corner of Madden's mouth twitched upward. His finger whitened on the trigger. The big gun roared four times. The slugs hit Jensen in the middle, folded him over. He clasped his hands across his stomach; his knees buckled under him. He sank to the ground like a deflated balloon, his face plowing into the mud.

2.

The usual clamor of the city room of the *Dispatch* had hit a new low when Marty Cowan, the managing editor, walked in. He picked his way through the organized confusion of the desks, but didn't stop for his usual banter with the men and women who sat in front of typewriters of varying ages and vintages, and passed by the copy boys without his usual greeting. He headed

for the frosted glass door at the end of the room, disappeared through it.

Barbara Lake got up from her desk, walked up to the slot where Jim Kiely stood talking to the copy men, who were half-heartedly slashing time copy to size. "What's it all about, Jim?" she asked.

Jim Kiely shrugged. "Marty phoned, said he wanted the whole staff on deck at eleven." He looked at the clock on the far wall. "It's just about that now. He'll probably let us all in on it together." Kiely was a lean man with a shock of grey hair, keen grey eyes, sharp inquisitive features.

Barbara pursed her lips, frowned. "You wouldn't be holding out on me, would you, Jim?"

Kiely pulled a battered briar from one pocket, a leather tobacco pouch from another. He dipped the bowl of the pipe into the pouch, started to pack it with the tip of his index finger. "Marty knows more about it than I do. Suppose you let him tell it." He looked up, as the frosted-glass door opened and Marty Cowan stepped out. "Better sit down, Babs. You'll be able to take it better."

The blonde walked back to her desk, perched on the corner of it and crossed her knees.

Marty Cowan stood at the front of the room, looking around. "Everybody here, Jim?" he called over.

The city editor nodded. "Everybody but a few district men. They won't figure in it anyway."

The managing editor raked his fingers through his hair, seemingly undecided where to begin. "I've got some bad news," he told the crowd. Immediately an excited hum filled the room. Cowan held his hand up for silence. "No, it's not that. The paper hasn't been sold, and nobody's going to lose his job. It's worse than that."

The murmur began to die away. When there was silence Cowan said: "One of our staff's been murdered. Taken for a ride. I've just come from identifying him at the morgue."

"Who?" Barbara Lake asked in a stunned silence.

Cowan half-turned. "Larry Jensen," he said. "He was found an hour ago in a mudflat in Jersey with four .45 slugs in his belly."

A mutter of anger rumbled through the room. Cowan again silenced the crowd with a gesture. "That's not the worst of it. Larry wasn't dead when they left him. The medical examiner told me his lungs were full of muddy water."

"Who did it?" somebody yelled above the hubbub.

Cowan shook his head. "We don't know. Yet."

"What was he working on, Marty?" Barbara Lake asked.

Cowan consulted the sheaf of assignment sheets in his hand, shook his head again. "Just routine stuff, as far as I can see. Nothing that was likely to put the heat on him." He turned to Jim Kiely. "You have him on anything special, Jim?"

Kiely chewed on the stem of his briar, shook his head. "Strictly routine stuff."

Cowan turned back to the crowd. "Any of you know about anything he was working on in his own time?" He waited, looked from face to face around the room, but drew nothing but blank stares, negative shakes of the head. He took a deep breath, then nodded. "If any of you think of anything that might give us a line on who murdered him, bring it right to me." He turned on his heel and walked back into his office, slamming the frosted-glass door after him.

There was a momentary shocked silence, and then the excited roar took over again. The news and feature men broke into small groups, the clatter of teletypes and occasional ringing of phones ignored.

Barbara Lake sat on the corner of her desk, dug into the depths of her handbag, came up with a cigarette. She lit it, took one puff, and removed it from her lips, studying the carmined end with distaste. She stubbed it out, hopped off the corner of her desk and walked over to where Jim Kiely sat behind his desk, smoking glumly.

"What are we going to do without Larry, Jim?" she asked. "The paper, I mean."

Kiely shook his head. "Everything we can." The juice rattled noisily in his pipe-stem. "Which isn't very much, I guess. We'll just have to leave it to the police."

Barbara laughed. "The heck with

the police. This is our job. Larry was one of us."

"Be sensible, Babs. What can we do that the police can't? They've got 18,000 trained men—"

"Yeah, but those 18,000 trained men have a million things on their mind. We've only got one thing on ours: to find the guy who killed Larry." She looked at the door, apparently reaching a decision, and started for it.

"Where are you going, Babs?"

She stopped with her hand on the knob. "You going to stop me?"

Kiely grimaced. "I guess we'll have to do without our star reporter for a while. But what are you going to do?"

"That depends on what Cowan is going to do, Jim," she said. "Larry Jensen was a reporter. If the rats who killed him get away with it, I'll be ashamed to let anybody know I was a newspaperman. If Cowan doesn't know how to go about getting the killers, I know a guy who does."

3.

The cab dropped Barbara Lake in front of an old brownstone building in the heart of a Brooklyn residential section. There was no indication that there might be a restaurant anywhere in the block, other than the oversized garbage cans in the areaway of the house in front of her. Luigi didn't need a sign to advertise. His customers knew their way,

and he couldn't handle any more business.

The blonde reporter handed a bill to the cabbie, walked to the decorative iron grill leading to the basement apartment. She pushed a small button alongside the door and after a moment the door creaked open. A large, amply proportioned woman filled the doorway.

"Miss Barbara," the woman in the doorway said warmly. "Your friend been waiting for you a long time." There was a flash of teeth in the gloom. "The way you look, he's not going to mind waiting, I can tell."

"I'm sorry to keep you up so late, Seraphine," Barbara said, taking the big woman's hand. "I'll bet Luigi's half-crazy."

The fat woman grinned again, shrugged. "It's nothing. Luigi, he sleeps. He snores, so Seraphine cannot sleep anyhow." She squeezed back against the wall to let Barbara slide past her, then locked the grilled gate. After Barbara, she waddled from the vestibule into a basement room that had been enlarged by breaking through the walls to make one huge dining-room. At the back was a large, old-fashioned wood-burning stove, and scattered around the room were a dozen wooden tables with bright red-check tablecloths.

"I leave some manicotti and some veal on the stove. You help yourself, eh?" Seraphine asked. "You don't mind if I go to bed." She

waddled to the stairs, climbed them with a loud puffing and snorting.

Johnny Liddell was at a corner table, on his third glass of chianti when Barbara walked in. She crossed the room, bent over, covered his lips with her soft mouth. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting too long, Johnny."

"I'm getting used to it." He grinned up at her, got up from his chair and helped her out of her long, loose-fitting coat, draping it over the back of the chair.

She was a few inches shorter than his five-eleven. Her long blonde hair was caught in a soft bun at the nape of her neck, and the tight-fitting green sweater made no attempt to conceal her assets.

"What's it all about?" Liddell wanted to know.

"I've got a job for you." She slid into a chair, waited while Liddell poured some wine into her glass. "The *Dispatch* is picking up the tab on it."

Liddell nodded. "What kind of job?"

"I want you to find a killer. One of our boys was murdered tonight."

Liddell whistled soundlessly, dropped into his chair. "Anyone I know?"

"Larry Jensen." She reached over, picked up the pack of cigarettes from the table in front of Liddell, shook two loose. "They shot him four times through the stomach and left him to drown in a mud puddle in Jersey." She shivered.

Liddell watched while she lit the two cigarettes, accepted one. "A ride, right? Any ideas?"

Barbara shook her head. "None. Neither have the cops. That's why Marty Cowan wants you to take it on. He said to tell you the sky's the limit. We want that killer, and we want him bad."

"How come Cowan didn't come along with you?"

Barbara took a deep drag on her cigarette, let the smoke drift from between half-parted lips. "He doesn't want to figure in it. If possible, he doesn't even want the police to know who hired you." She picked up her wine, sipped at it, studied Liddell over the rim. "There is one catch in the deal."

"It figures," Liddell said. "What?"

"The *Dispatch* wants a first-person exclusive from you when you break the case. That's where I come in. I've been detached from assignments to work with you on it."

Liddell nodded. "Okay, star reporter. Start working. You knew this Jensen: fill me in."

"I don't know where to begin," Barbara said.

"What was he working on? Was he stepping on any of the mobs' toes? After all, if somebody took the trouble to drive him over to Jersey and cool him off, he must have done something to somebody."

Barbara shook her head. "If he did, it didn't show. We went through all Larry's assignments for the past three weeks. It's all routine

stuff." She reached for her bag, dug into it, came up with a type-written sheet. "He did a couple of interviews in connection with that charity premiere of the new Gregory Peck picture. Covered the opening, too. Nothing there."

"Not unless he also reviewed the picture," Liddell commented.

Barbara looked down the type-written list, shook her head. "A feature on the Missing Persons Bureau a couple of weeks ago, two screwball interviews—a guy who makes leg pads for Shakespearean actors—"

"Leg falsies, yet," Liddell said.

"—the manager of a shop on Madison that features men's girdles." She looked up, passed the list to Liddell. "See for yourself. Nothing there that would tie in with—murder."

Liddell looked over the list, flipped the paper onto the table. "He had no regular beat?"

"No. He worked something like me. The desk gave him a pretty free hand—he was one of those guys who could do the tongue-in-cheek stuff. He came up with some dillies."

Liddell took a deep drag on his cigarette, blew a thin collar of ash from its end. "But he gets himself knocked off by a pro," he said. "Got anything else on him?"

Barbara shook her head. "We went through his desk. Just the usual collection of junk." She dug into her bag again and came up with a set of keys. "He kept a spare key

to his car and apartment in his drawer. I thought you might want to have a look around before the cops get to it."

Liddell bounced the keys on the palm of his hand, sniffed the aroma from the pots on the stove appreciatively. "That gives us just enough time to dig into the manicotti and veal Seraphine left on for us."

4.

Larry Jensen had lived in an old brownstone house on West Fourth Street in the Village. It was in a block filled with similarly weather-beaten brownstones that had been converted into fashionable apartments.

Johnny Liddell climbed the high stoop, found the vestibule door and tried it. It was locked. He jammed the key in, opened the door, stepped inside.

A cardboard sign tacked to the hall door said: "Please Close This Door After You." The last one in apparently hadn't believed in signs. The glass-covered apartment register said that Larry Jensen lived in 3D.

Liddell climbed the carpeted stairs in the inner hall to the top floor, found 3D to be one of the two rear apartments. He tried the knob, found the door locked, then used Jensen's spare key to open it.

The apartment beyond was in darkness. He slid his hand along the wall, found the switch, spilled a

bright yellow light into the room. He walked through the apartment, satisfying himself that it hadn't been searched. The door to the service entrance in the kitchen was locked.

There was little of interest in the living-room. The desk drawers yielded the usual jumble of papers, cancelled checks, galley-proofs and clips of stories bearing Jensen's by-line. All of them were in the innocuous, light-hearted vein, with the broad touch of satire that was Jensen's trademark.

The clothes in the bedroom closet gave little more: ticket stubs, scraps of paper with smudged pencil notes, a few tickets marked *Great White Way Dance Palace — Good For One Dance*, another clipping of a Jensen story dealing with the Missing Persons Bureau. Liddell read through it quickly, transferred it and the rest of the contents to his own pockets.

Suddenly he tensed. There was the unmistakable sound of a key being fitted into a lock, somewhere in the apartment. Quickly, he doused the bedroom light, pulled his .45 from its shoulder holster. It was too late to try to reach the living-room lights.

After a second he heard the scrape of a door being slowly opened.

Liddell flattened himself against the bedroom wall, applied his eye to the crack of the door. In seconds, the shadow of a man fell across the living-room floor. It was followed by the thin figure of the man himself, his .45 poked out in front of him.

He stood in the center of the room, scowled uncertainly at the lighted fixture, stared around suspiciously. He fanned the apartment with the muzzle of his gun, then settled for the bedroom.

"You in the bedroom. Come out before I fire," he said.

Liddell drew back to where he could cover the doorway more effectively. He waited for the thin man to come after him but, instead, there was the slam of a door from the direction of the kitchen. Liddell, cursing himself for giving the gunman a chance to escape, pushed open the bedroom door, ran to the kitchen.

He yanked open the now unlocked service door. The thin man was crouched at the head of the stairs, waiting for him. The .45 in his hand sounded like a cannon in the confined space. Two slugs chewed pieces out of the door near Liddell's head. He dropped to his face on the floor, trying to wiggle back to the kitchen. The little man in the hall straightened up, the gun in his hand spitting orange flame. A flying splinter of wood stung Liddell on the forehead. His finger tightened twice on the trigger of his .45; the gun jumped in his hand, then bucked again.

The gunman in the hall seemed to stagger under a body-blow. He stared at Liddell, his jaw beginning to sag. Desperately he fought to lift the .45 to firing position, but it had obviously grown too heavy.

He staggered back, lost his footing, disappeared down the steep stairs.

When Liddell walked to the head of the stairs and looked down, the gunman lay sprawled at the bottom of the flight, a tangle of arms and legs. He was dead by the time Liddell reached him.

Doors opened, muffled shouts and curses reached his ears. A woman screamed shrilly when she saw Liddell standing, gun in hand, over the dead man. She slammed the door, screamed again. Liddell looked up and saw Jensen's neighbor staring down the stairs at him, wide-eyed.

"Call Police Headquarters," Liddell told him. "Ask for Inspector Herlehy, Homicide. Tell him to get a couple of men over here right away."

5.

Inspector Herlehy sat behind an oversized desk in his cubbyhole office at headquarters, studying Johnny Liddell with no apparent trace of enthusiasm.

"I suppose you know I could lock you up and throw the key away for breaking and entering," he snapped.

Liddell held up a pack of cigarettes for approval, received a curt nod, hung one from the corner of his mouth. "You couldn't make it stick. I entered with a key given me by a client who wanted me to pick something up for him."

"You trying to tell me that Larry Jensen's a client of yours?"

Liddell lit his cigarette, blew a filmy stream of smoke ceilingward. "Ask him."

Herlehy pulled himself out of his chair, stamped across the room to where a water cooler stood humming noisily to itself. He pulled a paper cup from its rack, filled it with water. "Why'd Jensen hire you?"

"I can't violate a client's confidence," Liddell shrugged.

"Jensen's dead," Herlehy snapped at him. He took a deep swallow from the paper cup, crushed it in his fist, threw it at a wastebasket. He stiff-legged it back to where Liddell sat, towered over him. "His keys were missing when we found him."

"That's probably where the guy I shot got his set."

Herlehy glared at him, muttered under his breath, walked around his desk and sat down. "How do I know you got your set from Jensen?"

"Ask his boss at the paper. Marty Cowan."

Herlehy snorted. "What were you looking for at the flat?"

Liddell took the cigarette from between his lips, rolled it between thumb and forefinger. "I'm going to level with you, inspector."

"That'll be a pleasant novelty."

"I knew Jensen was dead when I went to his place. I had a late dinner with Barbara Lake. She let it slip." He took a deep drag on his cigarette, blew it at the ceiling in a feathery stream, watched it falter, then disintegrate. "I hustled over to his

place to see if I could find anything that would point to the killer."

"And?"

Liddell shook his head. "A dry well. Your boy on the slab busted in on me before I got started." He stalled off an interruption with a fast, "Got a make on him yet?"

"Not yet, but we will." The inspector opened his top drawer, extracted a fresh piece of gum, denuded it of its wrapper. "You didn't tell me why Jensen hired you."

"I don't know. I was supposed to meet him at his place and talk it over." He nodded at the bunch of keys on the inspector's desk. "That's why he gave me the keys. I was to go in and wait."

Herlehy stuck the gum between his teeth, beat a steady tattoo on it. "Who was he afraid of?"

Liddell shook his head. "If I knew, I'd be there instead of here. He never got a chance to tell me."

The inspector shook his head and started to argue. He was interrupted by a knock on the door and the entrance of a young uniformed patrolman. The cop deposited a large manila envelope on the inspector's desk.

"Just came up from the morgue, inspector."

Herlehy nodded. "Identification get a make on him yet, Ryan?"

The young cop shook his head.

Herlehy grumbled deep in his chest, nodded unhappily. "Keep me posted." He waited until the cop had closed the door behind him,

caught the envelope by its corner, dumped its contents on the top of the desk. He stirred them around with a thick forefinger. "Don't look like this will help us much."

Liddell got up from his chair, leaned over the desk. There was a thin, expensive-looking wristwatch, an old signet ring, a keychain and a bunch of keys in an alligator holder.

"The holder probably belonged to Jensen," Herlehy grunted. He picked it up, examined the keys, compared them with the bunch he'd taken from Liddell, nodded. "Yeah, here's a match for the one you had."

"That must mean he was the killer."

Herlehy looked up sourly. "Why? You had a set, too." He dropped the keys back on the desk, shook his head. "Maybe he didn't know Jensen was even dead. Maybe—" He was interrupted by the desk buzzer. Grimacing, he flipped the key on the intercom. "Let's have it."

"Ballistics, Inspector. No match on either of those two .45's with the slugs in Jensen. It was a .45 did the job, but neither of these."

Herlehy nodded. "Thanks." He flipped the key.

Liddell took a last puff on his cigarette, stubbed it out, tossed it at the wastebasket. "Away ahead of me, eh?"

"Away ahead of you," Herlehy agreed glumly. "Now we know that neither you nor John Doe down there hit Jensen. But we're still not

sure what either of you were doing prowling around his flat, are we?" Herlehy returned his attention to the desk top, picked up the pinseal wallet, flipped through it. "Doesn't mean a thing. No licenses, nothing with a name on it." He tossed the wallet down, picked up a paper matchbook, flipped it open. "He was right-handed, if that means anything."

Liddell picked up the matchbook when the inspector tossed it aside, studied the ad on the front cover. It said *Great White Way Dance Palace — 50 Beautiful Girls — 50 Gorgeous Girls*. Mentally, he debated the advisability of revealing the dance tickets he'd found in Jensen's pocket, dropped the decision. He tossed the matches back. "I'm properly impressed, inspector. He was right handed because he pulled his matches from the right side. Right?"

Herlehy grunted. He scooped up the wallet, watch and other belongings of the dead man, returned them to the envelope, dropped that in the wire basket on the corner of his desk. He looked up at the knock on the door. "Come in."

A man in shirtsleeves entered. "We've got him, Inspector." He looked questioningly at Liddell, received a nod from the man behind the desk. "His name's Maury Wasser. There's a want on him from Miami, Chicago and Detroit." He flipped a BI card on the desk. "He's a killer from away back."

The inspector studied the BI card, shook his head. "Looks like you're a hero instead of a heel on this one, Liddell. Wasser's wanted all over the map. They'll probably pin a medal instead of a rap on you for burning him." He dropped the card on his desk, nodded for the shirtsleeved man to leave. "Nice work, Stein." When Stein had left, he stirred the card with the tip of his finger. "From his record, Wasser was a hired gun."

"So? You think maybe Jensen stepped on somebody's toes and they paid to have him hit?"

Herlehy shook his head. "He didn't come cheap is my guess. No, if he was bought for the job, he was bought by a mob, not by a citizen with a beef. It's easier to write nasty letters to the editor. Safer, too."

"It doesn't make sense, inspector. What could a guy who writes mostly about a dame's derriere or men's girdles do to get a big-time mob out after his hide?"

Herlehy squinted at him. "You sure you don't know?"

"Scout's honor." Liddell held up his hand. "But I'm going to find out."

The inspector scratched at his scalp through his thick white mane. "I guess I can't hold you on this one, Liddell. But don't forget: Maury probably had some friends. They might be real upset about what happened to him."

Liddell grinned. "That's what

I'm hoping." He patted the empty space under his left arm. "Do I get Betsy back?"

Herlehy sighed, plucked at his nostrils with thumb and forefinger. "It should be kept as evidence, but — oh, what the hell." He pulled a pad over and scribbled on it. "Show this to the property clerk along with your license. He'll give it to you."

Liddell nodded his thanks, picked up the note, folded it and stuck it into his wallet.

"If I were you, I'd be a little more careful with that gun," Herlehy advised.

"I've got a license for it," Liddell said.

"A license to carry it. You haven't got a hunting license," the inspector told him.

6.

The *Great White Way Dance Palace* was on the northwest corner of Broadway and Forty-Fifth. A string of blinking multi-colored lights threw interesting shadows on the fly-specked studio photographs of tired looking blondes and brunettes in a dust-covered showcase outside. The flat, nasal tones of an announcer drifted out, clashed with the traffic sounds: "Come in an' see 'em, boys. Fifty of 'em. Fifty of the most gorgeous showgirls on Broadway to dance with you. Come in an' meet 'em."

Johnny Liddell dropped the cab

at the corner, turned, consulted the big clock on top of the Paramount. It was almost two A.M.

But even at that hour the crowd ebbed and flowed up Broadway in a restless, sleepless stream. Liddell walked down the flight of steps to the *Great White Way*, stopped in front of the ticket booth.

A fat, disheveled blonde sat behind the glass in the booth, chewed her wad of gum with the abstraction of a cow chewing its cud. She pushed a strip of tickets through the grating, scooped up his dollar bill, regarding him with blank, unseeing eyes. He pushed through the turnstile under the unfriendly eye of a huge ticket-taker dressed to resemble an admiral, and passed into the *Great White Way* ballroom.

It was a huge upholstered cellar, lit with dim blue lights. The air was heavily spiced with an odor compounded equally of cheap perfume and perspiration. At the far end of the room, a five-piece band was seated on a dais, doing unmentionable things to a popular song. Liddell walked into the gloom, found himself a place at the wooden rail that encircled the huge dance floor. He watched the slowly gyrating couples, locked in close embrace, the suggestive motions of the dancers.

Off to the left, a group of hostesses clustered together, laughing, chattering, bickering. One of them, a heavy-set blonde, noticed Liddell at the rail, peeled off from the group, and paraded past him with an exag-

gerated flip of her hips, dancing a solo in time to the music and doing a quick bump.

She sidled over to him, rubbed against him.

"Like to dance?" Her voice was heavy, raspy. In the half light her lips were heavily rouged, her eyes heavy-lidded. Her gown was cut in a deep vee that bared the deep cleft between her heavy breasts. She reeked of a cheap perfume.

Liddell looked past her to where a much younger girl stood on the edge of the group, watching them. He gestured toward her.

"I already have a date. She's expecting me."

The big blonde looked angrily toward the other girl, flung up her dress, wiggled her hips at him, stamped away. The younger one grinned at him, walked over in an eye-opening strut.

From close up, in the blue light, she looked about eighteen. Her hair was dark, thick, cascaded down over her shoulders. She wore a halter-type top to her black gown that removed any doubt of there being anything under it. Her lips were full, soft-looking.

"Well, hello," she greeted him. She looked toward the floor. "Want to dance?"

Liddell pulled the strip of tickets from his pocket, held it out to her. She took the strip, folded the tickets, dropped them into her bag. He followed her to the floor; she melted against him.

The floor lights seemed to grow dimmer, then blacked out. The music stepped up its tempo, a thin finger of light darted around the floor, picking out couples. As the music became more frenzied, the dancers whirled in greater abandon. Liddell could feel the body of the girl glued against his as it started to undulate slowly, insinuatingly. They barely moved from one spot; every ounce of the girl's 118 pounds seemed to be in motion but her feet.

Suddenly, the light speared them. The girl stepped up her motions, increased the tempo. As suddenly as it had come, the light left them, flitted elsewhere around the floor. Then the music stopped, the lights went on.

Liddell wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, took a deep breath. "My buckle really ought to shine after that one, baby," he grinned. "That's quite a whirl for twenty cents."

"Don't go looking for it with every ticket, mister." The girl's hair was a deep red, her eyes green. His first estimate was probably off by a couple of years, but from close he was sure she wasn't over 20. And not a pound of her 118 was either unaccounted for or misplaced. "That was the jackpot number. You saw the way the light jumped around the room?"

Liddell nodded.

"The best couple on the floor gets picked by the bandleader. The girl gets a bonus." The music started

again, she slid back into his arms. "We never know when the number's going to be played. That way, we can't set it up by saving that number for a special customer." She looked up into his face, seemed to like what she saw. "I don't always get a break like tonight. Last week I had a big fat old slob that had two left feet and more hands than an octopus." She leaned her head against his shoulder, hummed softly in time with the music.

"Been here long?" Liddell asked.

The girl shook her head, continued to hum.

"How long?" Liddell persisted.

"Three, four weeks," she told him. "Why?"

Liddell shrugged. "I was here about a month ago. Looks like a whole new crew. Don't the girls stay long?"

The redhead sniffed. "Some of them came with the lease." She tossed a contemptuous glance toward the unchosen girls in the pen. "But most of us are just marking time here until we get a break. You never know who'll drop by and see you here. Some of the girls have moved right into big shows."

Liddell nodded. "What time are you through?"

She looked up at him, pursed her lips. "We're not supposed to —"

He grinned at her. "That makes it all the more fun."

She grinned back. "We close at four. After that, I'm on my own. I —"

The music stopped again. "That was a short one," Liddell complained.

"I told you that last one was a break." They started toward the railing, but were stopped by a man with a scar along the side of his face.

"Good news, baby," he told her. "You won the bonus tonight." He looked at Liddell. "I'll take her from here, pal. The boss wants to see her."

Liddell started to protest, but the girl stopped him with a shake of her head. "Call me tomorrow. My name's Lee Mason. I'm at the Carter Arms." She winked at him, turned, disappeared into the mass of moving bodies in the wake of the scar faced man.

The following afternoon when he called the Carter Arms, Liddell was told that Miss Mason had checked out early that morning. He never saw her again.

7.

The *Back Room* was a little hole-in-the-wall coffee shop across the street from Police Headquarters. Barbara Lake was on her second cup of coffee and her fourth fingernail when Johnny Liddell finally appeared in the doorway. She waved to him from one of the rear booths, scowled at him as he walked toward her.

"Where've you been? You said two o' clock," she complained. She held up the tiny baguette on her

wrist for his inspection. "It's almost three."

Liddell slid into the seat opposite her. "I've been trying to find a girl," he grunted. He leaned back while a waitress shoved a stained menu in front of him. "I'll just have coffee. How about you?"

Barbara nodded. "Why should one more make any difference? I've already had two."

The waitress scooped up the menus, shuffled back to the kitchen.

"Now, what's with this girl?" Barbara wanted to know. "Any particular girl, or were you just looking for a girl?"

"A little redhead. I met her at the *Great White Way* dance hall last night."

"Oh, fine. He hangs me up at Luigi's, then goes partying in dance halls," Barbara glared at him. "And here I was feeling sorry for you, thinking Herlehy was giving you a bad time on the shooting."

"He did." Liddell waited until the waitress had slid the two cups of coffee in front of them and retreated. "I stumbled on something that led to the dance hall and I followed it up. That's how I came to meet the girl."

"What was the something you stumbled on?"

Liddell pulled the dance hall tickets from his pocket. "These were in an old suit of Jensen's at his apartment. I stuck them in my pocket on a hunch. Right after that this torpedo walked in."

Barbara nodded. "I read about it." She dug into her purse, brought up a clipping. "Here's the story if you missed it."

Liddell grinned glumly. "I don't have to read about it. I was there." He sipped at his coffee, burned his tongue, swore softly. "Anyway, while I'm in Herlehy's office, they bring the torpedo's stuff up from the morgue. One of the things they brought in was a pack of matches with the *Great White Way* dance hall stamped on the cover."

Barbara considered it. "Why didn't you give me a ring and take me along?"

"Oh, sure. I could use you at a dime-a-dance joint like I could use another head." He picked a cigarette up from the table, lit it. "Incidentally, inflation's hit that racket too. The dime dances are now twenty cents."

"What do you care? Live it up. The *Dispatch* is picking up the tab. You still haven't told me about the girl." She picked the cigarette from between Liddell's fingers, took a deep drag. "The one you were looking for. Remember?"

"She was one of the hostesses. I thought she might be able to tell me something about Jensen. Anyway, I figured if I could get close enough to her I could get her to find out if any of the other girls knew him and what he was looking for up there."

Barbara cocked an eyebrow at him. "You kidding?" she asked.

"Not Jensen. Don't forget a guy with a standing feature like his could do himself a lot of good with plenty of classy gals. He wouldn't have to play the honkytonks for his babes." He retrieved his cigarette, smoked for a minute. "No, I got a hunch that whatever he was doing there was directly connected with his death."

"What?" Barbara asked.

Liddell fished his wallet from his inside pocket, pulled out a clipping, passed it over. "He did this story a couple of weeks ago."

Barbara glanced at it, nodded. "That's right. That's the column he did on the Missing Persons Bureau."

"Suppose he found something in the Missing Persons Bureau that tied up with somebody or something at the *Great White Way*. He decided to follow it through by himself and stumbled over something really big. Something so big they had to knock him off to keep him quiet."

The blonde bit her full lower lip. "I see what you mean. It would explain how a screwball feature man got the gang mad enough at him to go after him." Her eyes studied Liddell's expression. "The redhead couldn't help you?"

"The redhead checked out of her hotel early this morning and left no forwarding address," Liddell said. "Now I'm right back where I started."

"Except for one thing." She picked up the clipping of Jensen's story. "If you're right that this yarn

started Jensen on the story, why can't we pick it up where he did — at the Missing Persons Bureau?"

Liddell appeared to consider it. "That might be a good idea. Isn't it lucky I suggested we meet here — right across the street from Headquarters?"

The blonde made a face at him, stuck out her tongue, got up and walked to the door.

8.

The Bureau of Missing Persons was on the fourth floor at headquarters. They rode up in the old-fashioned open-grillwork elevator and debarked into what appeared to be a large reception corridor. At the far end of the corridor a thick steel mesh cut the room in two. On the other side of the mesh, a man sat with a telephone mouthpiece strapped to his chest. His fingers jumped from key to key unerringly on the huge switchboard.

Johnny Liddell led the way through a door set in the mesh, headed down a long corridor to a frosted-glass door marked "Missing Persons." The room beyond was large, lined on three sides with mammoth filing cabinets. In the center of the room, under large overhead lights, were two library tables. A man wearing a lieutenant's badge sat at a desk near the door riffling through a stack of filing cards. He looked up as Liddell and the blonde walked in, smiled.

"Well, if it isn't Liddell, the supersleuth. Hiya, Miss Lake." He looked from one to the other. "What are you doing back here in the catacombs, Liddell? I thought you only dealt with glamorous things like murder."

"Now is that any way to greet an old friend who's interested in putting your picture in the paper, lieutenant?" Liddell asked.

"Don't give me that. I've already had my picture in the paper."

"But that was when you were a child bride," Liddell grinned.

"How about you, Miss Lake? You tell me what you're doing here."

The blonde pursed her lips, shrugged. "It's like the man says, lieutenant. We're looking for a story."

The lieutenant set down his stack of cards, leaned back, and studied them curiously. "I've been in this department fifteen years, we never get a write-up. Now all of a sudden in two weeks we get interviewed twice. And by the same paper, yet." His eyes hopped from Liddell to the blonde and back. "It wouldn't have something to do with Jensen getting himself very dead all of a sudden, would it?" he guessed shrewdly.

"That's what we're hoping you can tell us, lieutenant," Liddell nodded. "Did he show any particular interest in any phase of your operation up here? What I mean is, did he act especially interested in

anything that he may have decided to follow up?"

The man behind the desk ridged his forehead in concentration. "I don't know if he was going to follow it up or not. But I did hear from him after the article ran."

"What about?" Liddell wanted to know.

The lieutenant scratched at his head, frowned. "I didn't pay too much attention, tell you the truth. He wanted me to make a quick check of the files to see if there was any final disposition on a certain case."

"What was it?" Liddell demanded.

"I don't remember offhand —"

Liddell groaned, rolled his eyes ceilingward.

"— but I jotted it down on my calendar, I think." The lieutenant flipped back the pages on his desk calendar, stopped at a page. "That's right." He pointed to a scribbled note. "It was about ten days ago. Woman's kid was missing. A young girl named Denny Lewis. I suppose you want to see her picture?"

Liddell nodded.

The lieutenant pulled himself out of his chair, shuffled over to a huge filing case and pulled open a drawer. He fumbled in it for a moment, brought out a large manila envelope. He brought it back to the desk, dropped it in front of Liddell. "I remember another thing. He asked me what percentage of the non-finds were girls, young girls."

"And?"

The lieutenant shrugged. "It was a pretty high percentage. But it figures. Older people when they disappear usually turn up in the river or in a furnished room with the gas on. Young girls," he shrugged. "Some of them get married, want to cut ties with the old folks. Others go on the stage or are ashamed to admit they haven't made the grade in the big town. You know the answer as well as I do."

Liddell nodded, dumped the contents of the envelope on the desk. There was a large picture of a heavily made-up, dark-haired girl with large, prominent teeth. He picked up the report, skimmed through it, flipped it back on the desk. "Eighteen, came from Ohio, won a dance contest out there."

"See what I mean?"

Liddell nodded, scowled at the pile of papers on the desk. "I wonder why Jensen should pick her out to get interested in?" He pulled the clipping of Jensen's story from his pocket, read through it, nodded. "Here she is. He describes her by everything but name."

"Larry was syndicated. Maybe her mother saw the item in Ohio and got in touch with him. Maybe she gave him an idea."

Liddell nodded. He underscored a few lines of type with his thumb-nail. "Here's another one he talked about. A pert little redhead from Canada, came to New York to make the big time, disappeared

from sight. Any idea of who she was, lieutenant?"

The lieutenant took the clipping, frowned over it, nodded. "I think I can find her for you." He gathered up the envelope, returned it to its file, started rummaging through the other drawers.

"A redhead," Barbara whispered. "You think —"

Liddell shrugged. "It's a chance."

The lieutenant returned, handed Liddell a picture. "Name's Laureen Watts. Came from Kingston, Ontario. Last heard of six months ago."

Liddell looked at the picture, shook his head. "I thought I might have known her," he explained lamely. He took the report, skimmed through it, frowned. "Here's something interesting. Says her hobby was dancing. Both of them liked dancing. Interesting?"

The lieutenant considered it, didn't seem impressed. "What kid that age doesn't?" He returned the material to its folder. "Anything else I can tell you, Liddell?"

Liddell shook his head. "Not right now, lieutenant. But maybe I'll have something to tell you real soon."

9.

The man behind the big mahogany desk laced his fingers at the back of his head, let his eyes roam from the top of Barbara Lake's head to her ballet-shoed feet with appropri-

ate stops in between. His eyes were cold, seemed to undress her as they roamed over her. The corner of his mouth was twisted upward in a perpetual sneer by a scar that ran down the side of his cheek. His face glowed damply in the reflected light of the room.

"What makes you think we can use you here at the *Great White Way*, Blondie?" he wanted to know.

Barbara shrugged. "I'm a good dancer, Mr. Madden. Back in Michigan I won all the local dance contests." She fumbled with her bag. "I—I just thought I could work here until I got a break in a show."

Lew Madden nodded, his heavily-veined lids half covering his eyes. "Your people still back in Michigan, eh? You here alone?"

Barbara nodded. "My people think I'm doing well in a show. I can't face them until I do."

Madden licked at his lips, got up from the desk chair and walked around the desk. "I might be able to help you," he said. He wiped the beads of perspiration off his upper lip with the side of his hand. "Once I get to know you better." He walked over, caught the blonde by the arm. "I got a lot of contacts. I can do a lot of good—for people I like." He tried to pull her toward him.

"What's going on, Lew?" a soft, silky voice asked from the direction of the doorway.

Madden froze, dropped his hand

from the girl's arm. He and Barbara turned to face the newcomer.

"I—I was just putting a new girl on, boss." He pasted a smile on his loose lips. "We can use some new girls—"

The newcomer was a small, slim man. His hair was thick, oily-black, split in a three-quarter part that revealed the startling whiteness of his scalp. The carefully padded shoulders and elevator shoes failed to disguise his frailness. His lips were full and dark red, his face a pale oval. He looked soft, ineffectual. All except his eyes—they looked lethal.

Without taking his eyes off Barbara, the newcomer said softly. "Introduce me, Lew. Where's your manners?"

Madden licked at his lips, worked on the smile. "This is the boss, baby. Mr. Zervas. He runs the *Great White Way*."

Zervas crossed the room with a peculiar mincing step, stopped in front of Barbara. He looked up at her, his full lips parted in a smile that stopped short of his eyes. "I didn't get your name, Blondie."

"Laurette LaRose," Barbara said.

The short man nodded. "Very pretty. Your real name—or a professional name?"

"My stage name. I—I came from Michigan to go on the stage, Mr. Zervas. I'm using that name until I make the grade."

"Very smart." He let his eyes rove over her, nodded. "Be here at

8:30. You got an evening gown?"

Barbara hesitated.

Zervas pulled a roll from his pocket, peeled off two fifties. "Get yourself a gown. We'll consider this a personal loan from me to you." He pushed the bills into her hand. "You better get going if you're going to be back here tonight."

Barbara nodded, backed away to the door. "Thanks," she said, and walked out, closing the door after her. Zervas' cold stare followed her until the door closed, then pivoted over to where Madden stood, small beads of perspiration glistening on his forehead.

"Pretty nice, isn't she?" Madden dry-washed his hands. "It shouldn't take long to place a piece like that, should it?"

"I told you to keep your hands off the merchandise, Madden." Zervas' voice was cold, lethal. "Maybe you don't figure I'm important enough so you got to do what I say?"

Madden shook his head jerkily. "No, you got me wrong, boss. I'm too smart to think —"

There was no mistaking the threat in the smaller man's tone. "Maybe that's the trouble. Maybe you're too smart. I know of cases where a guy's head got so big we had to put a couple holes in it to let the air out. That's a pretty funny joke, isn't it, Madden?"

Madden swabbed at his damp forehead, tried a smile for effect and missed. "Yeah, real funny, boss."

"So funny a guy could die laughing," Zervas told him. He walked around behind his desk, dropped into his chair. "We've got some customers coming in to look over the stock tonight. Set it up for 11:30."

Madden nodded, hurried for the door.

"And, Madden —" Zervas' voice was silky, his eyes cold when the bigger man turned to look at him. "Tonight, you'd better make sure nothing goes wrong."

10.

At 11 that night, Johnny Liddell walked into the *Great White Way Dance Palace* and squinted around the dimly lit room. He leaned over the railing, watched the sinuous twisting of the couples on the floor, winced at the weird effects being achieved by the musicians. His eyes jumped around the floor, sought to single Barbara Lake out, failed to see her. He waited until the music stopped and the couples started filtering off the dance floor.

She was with a tall, gangling sailor who had her arm in a tight grip. The evening gown she had bought with Zervas' money looked as though she had been poured into it. Tonight she wore her hair in a thick, wavy blonde cascade down over her shoulders. Her body was ripe, lush. Swelling breasts showed over the top of the low-cut gown. Her trim waist hinted at full hips and long legs hidden by the swell of her skirt.

Liddell could almost sympathize with the sailor's ambition to hold onto her.

Barbara's eyes roved along the rail, saw Liddell at almost the same instant that he saw her. She passed an almost invisible, prearranged signal.

A fat, sweat-flecked man started through the crowd toward her, but Liddell managed to get to her first, shoved a strip of tickets into her hand. The fat man started to protest, took a second look at Liddell's shoulders, and shuffled off into the crowd, muttering darkly to himself.

The music started again and they pirouetted away, leaving her former partner standing alone on the floor.

"Find out anything?" Liddell wanted to know.

The blonde shook her head imperceptibly. "I tried to pump them about your redhead. All they know is that she got a swell offer from someplace upstate and she snapped it up. Happens pretty often around here, I gather."

"A regular cradle of the stars," Liddell said. "How do they get picked up? Who signs them up?"

Barbara shrugged. "One of the gals tipped me off that whenever they play a moonlight waltz the talent scouts get a chance to look the girls over. Then they —"

Liddell's hand tightened around her waist. "What's upstairs?"

"The boss' office. Why?"

Without an explanation he swung her around so she could see the stair-

case at the back of the hall. Four stout, over-dressed women were laboring their way up to the story above.

Barbara looked from the stairs to Liddell and back. "Who're they?"

"I only know one of them, but I can guess who the rest are. The big sleazy-looking blonde's name is May Hatton. She's a famous madam out in Seattle." He danced quietly for a moment. "If a moonlight waltz goes on within the next ten minutes, I think we'll have our answer."

Upstairs, Lew Madden sat in an oversized armchair, cracking his knuckles nervously. He watched Zervas ruffling through a pile of papers on his desk.

There was a rap on the door. Zervas stopped fiddling with the papers, didn't look up. After a second the knock was repeated. He nodded, stabbed at a button on the corner of the desk. There was the chuckle of an electric latch and the door swung open to admit the four madams.

"Tell Dominic to set it up for the moonlight number, Madden," Zervas snapped. He nodded to the women, waved them to a big couch on the far side of the room. "We'll be ready for you after this number."

Madden picked up a phone from the desk, jabbed at a button on the base, growled a few instructions into it, dropped it on the hook.

"We've got some real talent for you down there," Zervas told them.

A heavy blonde woman stirred restively on the couch. In the soft light of the room it was evident that she was old, her make-up a stiff mask covering the sag and wrinkle of age with indifferent success. Her eyes were hard and bright, her bleached hair thinned by constant exposure to chemicals. Her lipstick was smeared, her teeth nicotine-stained.

"That's fine, if we get what we pick." Her voice was harsh, coarse.

Zervas' tone was silky. "Meaning what?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders. "Last time I was East I picked a little number I didn't get. A little redhead —"

The man behind the desk looked over to Madden. "Well?"

"You remember the kid, boss. I told you about her. She was sick. We couldn't make the delivery," Madden said.

"You're a liar. She's working in Harry Evans' place in KC. And doing good," the woman added. "The one you sent me in her place, I had to put her on a leash every time I took her for a walk."

"All right, that's enough." Zervas indicated a light on the corner of his desk. "The moonlight number's going on. I'll straighten this out in the morning." He snapped a hard-eyed look at Madden. "Pick your stuff, and I'll personally see to it you get delivery."

Madden walked over to the far wall, pulled back a curtain. A large

pane of one-way glass looked out onto the dance floor below. When Zervas pushed a button, the lights on the floor dimmed, went out. A spotlight started to flit around the room, picking out couple after couple.

It stopped on a slim brunette dancing with a man in a soldier's uniform. He tried to pull her closer, but she managed to wriggle free. There were no takers in Zervas' office.

The spotlight continued its tireless tour of the room. Madden noted down the name of each girl as the women at the window made their selections.

Suddenly, as the spotlight stopped on a blonde dancing with a heavy-shouldered man, the old blonde grabbed Zervas' arm. "Who's that girl?" she asked.

Zervas grinned. "Pretty nice, isn't she? You'd better grab her. She won't last around here very long. Not with that equipment."

The fat blonde squinted through the glass, her beady eyes appraising Barbara on the floor below. She nodded, disturbing the rolls of fat under her chin. "That's for me. That makes five. When do I get delivery?"

Zervas walked back to his desk chair, dropped into it. "First thing in the morning they'll be ready to leave. Get their contracts, Madden." His eyes watched Madden's back bleakly as the gunman walked over to the far wall, moved a picture

revealing a safe. He spun the dials, opened the door, dug his hand into the interior and came up with a bundle of contracts. "Make sure they're the right ones," Zervas told him.

Madden flipped through the pile of contracts, selected a handful, walked back and dropped them on the small man's desk. "They're all here except the new dame. We didn't have time to sign her yet."

The fat blonde sputtered angrily, a small bubble formed in the corner of her moist mouth. "You're not pulling that on me again, Zervas. I bucked for the blonde and —"

"Cut it out," Zervas snapped. "I told you you'd get what you ordered." He sorted the contracts on his desk, compared the names with a slip in his hand. "Let's see. There's four for Gypsy. Three for Rose's joint." He looked up. "Business must be punk upstate."

A faded redhead sniffed, shrugged thin shoulders. "It ain't what it was, that's for sure." She picked up the three contracts, looked through them. "Me, I've got a beef like May's. The last time I ordered some nice merchandise, it got switched on me." Her eyes moved up from the contracts, stared at Madden. "That don't help business none."

Zervas growled in his chest, finished handing out the contracts to the other madams. "We'll arrange transportation. You have them picked up at the station or airport as usual. Check?"

The women nodded. They wandered aimlessly around the room while Madden called down for cabs. May Hatton stood at the one-way glass, stared down at the floor below. "It's like I said, Zervas. I expect what I ordered. If I don't get it, I'm not accepting delivery."

"You'll get it," he promised. There was a knock on the door. "That's your cab. You'd better start hustling." He watched with glowering eyes as Madden escorted the women to the door, closed it after them.

Madden turned, pasted a sickly grin on his face, dry-washed his hands nervously. "That's a good night's work, boss."

Zervas' expression didn't change. "Why'd you switch that dame on Hatton?"

The motion of Madden's hands became faster, a faint line of perspiration glowing along his hair line. He tried for the smile again, but it was a weak caricature of a grin. "I told you, boss. She got sick."

Zervas got up from his chair, scowled at the other man. In his hand he held an ugly-looking snub-nosed .38. "So she got sick and you had to let her go. You know something? You don't look too healthy right now."

Madden's face glowed damply. He wiped at the wet smear of his mouth with the back of his hand. Suddenly his fingers streaked for his left lapel. They had just touched the edge of his gun butt when the .38

in Zervas' hand went off. Madden clasped both hands to his midsection, tried vainly to stem the flow of red that was already beginning to seep through his laced fingers.

The .38 roared again. Madden staggered backward as the slug caught him high in the chest. The third shot knocked him to his knees. He struggled to pull himself to his feet, toppled over, hit the floor face first. Zervas walked over, turned him over with the toe of his shoe. "Yes, sir. You look like a pretty sick guy to me. Pretty sick."

He walked back to his desk, snapped a button on the base of the intercom. After a moment, a metallic voice answered him.

"Send Evans up right away, Mike," he snapped into the instrument, then turned it off. He reached into the humidor on the desk, selected a cigar, bit off the end, spat it at Madden's body. There was a fine collar of ash on the end of it by the time Evans identified himself with a code knock. Zervas pushed the button to open the door, watched Evans as he walked in.

The newcomer was shorter than Madden had been, but what he lacked in height he more than made up in breadth. His shoulders were disproportionately wide, his arms long and ape-like. He had a ruddy face, a nose that had been broken at some time and badly set, and red, brush-like hair. He struggled to keep his eyes off the body on the floor, lost the struggle.

"Madden is retiring as house manager, Evans. I was thinking you might make a good replacement. What do you think?" Zervas put the cigar in the center of his mouth, twirled it between thumb and forefinger.

"I think so." Evans said. He looked down at Madden's body with no show of emotion. "I always did think so. Madden didn't."

Zervas nodded. "He changed his mind. Tonight, have five cars at the back door. Four for the broads, one for Madden. I think he'd like to ride alone."

"Check. Have the girls been tapped yet?"

Zervas shook his head, handed the list of names to the new house man. "Here they are. See that they're ready to leave soon's we close." He waved the cigar at Madden. "He'll be leaving around the same time."

II.

Barbara Lake walked off the dance floor, skirted a row of rickety wooden tables where couples and stags were drinking beer from paper cups. As she passed the table where Johnny Liddell sat, she nodded almost imperceptibly, continued on to the pen where the girls were lined up preparatory to the next number. Liddell drained his glass, got up, ambled over to the railing, appeared to be making a choice from the girls.

As the number started, he held

out a strip of tickets to Barbara, led her to the dance floor.

"It's come, Johnny. First night in the place and I hit the jackpot," she whispered into his ear.

He whirled her around several times, made certain no one was close enough to overhear. "What's come?"

"I won the last moonlight waltz and they signed me to a contract to work on the Coast. They made a big deal out of it."

"Where on the Coast? Seattle?"

"I don't know. All I know is, six other girls are going to the same place. A car picks us up tonight after this place closes and takes us to the airport." She glanced over his shoulder, looked around, dropped her voice. "They're picking us up at the back door. I had to give them my hotel key. They sent someone over to pack for me."

Liddell nodded. "I'll be around."

12.

Evans scowled at the floor man. "Why didn't you tell me this before the boss left for the night?" he asked.

The floor man shrugged, stared out at the floor where Barbara danced past with Liddell. "I'm telling you. All night I been trying to remember where I know the babe from. I try to figure all the joints and cellars around town, but she don't register." He snapped his fingers. "It comes to me like that. I never seen her around the spots."

"Where, then?"

"In the courthouse, Evans. I seen that babe in the press box while they had that café trial on last winter." He watched Barbara whirl by and nodded, half to himself.

"You're positive?" Evans asked.

The floor man nodded. "I never forget a face. Especially a cop's or a reporter's. That's the same dame."

Evans chewed on his lower lip, consulted his watch. "I can't reach the boss for an hour or so." He squinted unhappily onto the dance floor. "Bring her up to the office. If she's a reporter, I'll give her an interview. One she can't print!"

Evans turned, walked up the stairs to Zervas' office, let himself in with a key from his chain. He walked over to the window that overlooked the dance floor, watched while the floor man tapped Barbara on the shoulder and talked with her for a moment. The blonde shrugged her shoulders to her partner, turned and followed the house man in the direction of the stairs.

13.

Johnny Liddell and Inspector Herlehy huddled behind an old packing case in the alley behind the *Great White Way*. Herlehy pulled back his sleeve, squinted at the watch on his wrist. "Looks like it's a dry run, Liddell. They should have been here by now if they're coming."

Liddell shook his head. "I tell

you Barbara told me —" He broke off, tugged at the inspector's sleeve as the beam of a headlight split the gloom of the alley.

Herlehy stuck his head out far enough to make certain the squad he had brought along was out of sight, slid back behind the case. "Remember, Liddell. No shooting unless it's absolutely necessary. This is our party. You're just along for the ride."

Liddell nodded, watched as five cars pulled up at the back entrance to the dance hall. The back door opened and a stream of girls started for the cars. Two men, carrying a limp form between them, headed for the fifth car.

Herlehy placed his whistle between his teeth, waited until the men were far enough from the back door, then blew a shrill toot. The shadows disgorged a dozen men who descended on the drivers and quietly overpowered them. It was all over in a matter of seconds.

Liddell headed for the fifth car, pulled the door open, and was looking down at Madden's body when Herlehy joined him. "One of Zervas' top guns," Herlehy said. He bent over him, shook his head. "Twice through the belly, one through the chest. He won't be giving us any trouble."

Liddell didn't appear to hear him. He was looking at the girls lined up along the wall. Suddenly, he felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"There was another girl supposed to go with you tonight. A blonde." He looked at a redhead whose mouth was a crimson gash against the pastiness of her face. "Where is she?"

The redhead shrugged. "I don't know what this is all about," she whimpered.

"I know the one you mean, mister," a straw-colored blonde volunteered. "I saw you dancing with her tonight. That the one?"

Liddell nodded. "Where is she?"

"I saw her go upstairs with one of the floor men an hour or so ago. I haven't seen her since."

Liddell grunted, questioned the other girls, got nowhere. Barbara had been last seen on her way to the office. He shoved his way past the girls, pulled open the back door, climbed the stairs to the office. The door was locked but after a few minutes with a strip of celluloid, he pushed it open, walked in and dropped heavily into the chair behind the desk.

14.

Evans, the house manager was later getting back to the *Great White Way* than he had expected to be. Since he entered by a private door he had no way of knowing of the raid and the capture of his cars and their cargo. He also had no way of knowing, until he turned on the light, that a man was sitting behind his desk, ticking off the minutes until his return.

As he flicked on the light, his hand snapped toward his shoulder holster, froze at the sight of the .45 whose muzzle stared him in the face. His eyes rolled upward from the gun to Johnny Liddell's unblinking gaze and a chill finger of dread raised goose pimples along his spine.

"What do you want?" he snapped at Liddell.

"You, pal," Liddell said humorlessly. "Boiled, fried or roasted, I want you. It looks like it's going to be fried, from the stiff the cops took out of this place tonight. But they don't get you until I'm through with you. Maybe then, they won't want you." He got up from his chair, walked over to where Evans stood, reached in and relieved him of the gun in his shoulder holster. "Where's Barbara Lake?" he asked conversationally.

"Never heard of her," Evans said.

Liddell swung the barrel of the .45 in a small arc, laid it across the house man's mouth. Blood spurted from Evans' smashed lips, and he staggered backward, fingers fumbling to see how many teeth were broken.

"Help your memory?" Liddell asked.

Evans shook his head stubbornly, a trickle of blood coursing from the corner of his mouth. "I don't know."

Liddell lashed out again, knocked the heavy man to his knees. "Get up," he said. When Evans gave no sign of moving, Liddell caught him

by his collar, dragged him to his feet, slammed him into a chair.

Evans was having difficulty focusing his eyes; a stream of blood had cascaded from his smashed mouth to stain the front of his shirt.

"Where's Barbara Lake?" Liddell asked him.

Evans managed to arrange his battered lips in a sneer. "I don't know."

Liddell sighed. "Don't make me do it the hard way, pal. Not that I wouldn't enjoy it, but I haven't got the time right now. I'll ask you just once more. Where's Barbara?"

The broad man ignored him, looked down at his hands in his lap, played with his diamond ring.

Liddell grabbed a handful of Evans' hair, pulled his head back until he faced the house man eye to eye. "Don't go hard-to-reach on me, pal. This isn't a police station where a shyster lawyer can show up with a writ. You're not getting out of here until I get what I want." He pushed the man's head back so hard it banged on the chair. "And get this. You're telling me what I want to know. How much persuasion I have to use depends on you."

Evans' breath whistled through his smashed lips. "I don't know nothing. And you can't make me change my mind."

Liddell grinned bleakly. "That's what makes horse racing, sucker. A difference of opinion." He reversed the gun, held it by the barrel. "I'm going to start feeding you this rod,

butt first. You'll talk or, so help me, I'll leave you as toothless as the day you were born."

Evans looked from the gun butt to Liddell's eyes, squeezed back against the cushions. Still, he shook his head.

Liddell swore under his breath, swung the flat of his hand in an arc, hit Evans across the side of the face with such force that blood spurted. He continued the motion back and forth until the man in the chair held up his hand in surrender. "She's out Zervas' place." His head sank onto his chest. "I found out she was a reporter and took her out there."

15.

Zervas sat on the couch in his large living room, stared at Barbara Lake. Her eyes were frightened, her face bruised from a blow.

"A smart broad, eh?" he snapped coldly. "You think you can play Zervas for a sucker?" He hit his chest with the side of his hand. "So that rag of yours is still trying to dig out that story. What we gave Jensen — that wasn't enough?"

"They know you killed Larry," she said. "They'll find some way to prove it, too."

Zervas got up from the couch, walked over to where the blonde stood. His eyes took in the thick, molten yellow hair, the lush breasts, the promise of long legs and rounded hips under the fullness of her gown.

"Sure. I killed him. So what? You're not going to be telling anyone, baby." He reached out, felt the softness of her arm. "You know, it's going to be a waste of real nice material when you go." He ran his hand up her arm to her shoulder. "Maybe if you're nice to Zervas we can postpone it, eh?"

Barbara slid from under his caress, swung her open palm at his face. Zervas caught her arm, twisted it behind her back, pulled her close, sank his lips into the hollow of her throat.

Barbara struggled, managed to get the flat of her palms against his chest, pushed him away. Zervas grinned at her, reached out, grabbed a handful of the flimsy material at her neckline, pulled it away. Then he snatched wildly at the straps on her naked shoulder, and tore them away. Her breasts spilled out, round, firm, pink-tipped. Zervas grabbed her around the waist, bent her over backwards.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," a cold voice broke in.

Zervas stiffened, released his hold on Barbara, spun around. Liddell stood in the doorway, .45 in hand. The gangster started to go for his gun, decided against it.

"Mike!" he yelled.

The door to the room opened and a man in shirt sleeves ducked in, gun in hand. He raised the gun at Liddell and the .45 in the private detective's fist barked loudly. A blue-black hole appeared in the cen-

ter of the man's forehead and he tumbled to the floor, didn't move.

Waving Zervas away from the door, Liddell circled to it, locked it.

"If you're the law, this can be fixed," Zervas told him. "I've got a lot of friends who —"

"Get his gun, Babs," Liddell said.

Barbara reached into the gunman's coat, made the split-second mistake of coming between him and Liddell. Zervas caught her, threw her at the detective, knocked him off-balance. In a flash he was on top of Liddell, his pointed toe aimed at the private detective's groin, missing by inches. Liddell chopped down at the man's leg with the barrel of his gun, brought a yelp of pain as it connected with his shinbone.

He regained his balance, was ready for Zervas' next lunge, slammed him across the face with the flat of his gun. Zervas, howling with pain, lowered his head, charged again. Liddell sidestepped, chopped at the side of his neck, and followed him down. Zervas hit the floor face first, lay there moaning.

Barbara walked over to where

Liddell straddled the half-conscious gangster, grinned at him weakly. "I didn't think you were ever coming."

"Sorry, baby," he told her. "You didn't leave any forwarding address." He nodded at the phone. "Don't you think you ought to file that story of yours?"

Barbara reached up, kissed him lightly. "If I want to have a job to go back to, I'd better." She picked up the receiver, gave the number of the *Dispatch*. After a moment, "Desk? This is Barbara Lake. Get me Rewrite." She waited for a second. "Ready? Okay — slug this with Larry Jensen's by-line: Police tonight broke up a chain of white-slave nests operated by Boss Zervas —"

Zervas struggled to a sitting position, stared at the blonde. "You're crazy. Larry Jensen is dead. He couldn't write any story."

Liddell lashed out with the side of the gun, slammed the gangster flat against the floor. "That shows how half-smart you are, Zervas. Didn't anybody ever tell you you can't kill a reporter?"



BY JONATHAN CRAIG

IT WAS the shabbiest strip dive on the shabbiest street in the tenderloin. Up here, on the stripper's platform above the horseshoe-shaped bar, the air was hot and sour, so heavy with the stench of cigars and sweat and cheap hair oil that she could scarcely breathe.

It had been a long search but, there on the stage, she looked down into the audience and knew she had found

The Right One

But she kept on breathing, somehow, and she kept on smiling. You always smiled, and you always kept your body in motion, no matter how much it hurt your lungs to breathe and your face to smile. If you didn't, there'd be no job tomorrow night.

Not that the job mattered. Not that *anything* really mattered any more. But this was the kind of place you'd meet him. The bumps and grinds



and the smiling were just things you had to keep doing while you waited. They wouldn't let you wait for free. They'd give you a few dollars a night if you showed your body, but otherwise it was outside. They were sharp. They knew you were on the thin edge of nothing, and they didn't give a good god-damn. Nobody did. Not even you.

So you kept smiling and you kept the bumps and grinds going — and you kept waiting for the right one. You'd know him. You'd recognize him the instant you saw him. When your business is men, and always has been, you'll damn well know him. He'll have the look. There'll be nothing intuitive about it, nothing mysterious. It's just that you've looked into so many thousand hungry male eyes you've learned to see straight through them, all the way through.

She saw him just as she reached one edge of the platform and turned to walk the other way. He hadn't been sitting down there at the bar a moment ago, but he was there now, and suddenly she felt the thin film of perspiration on her body grow chill. She missed a step, and someone in the crowd giggled, and she caught her balance and moved with the stripper's long stride to the other side of the platform to look down at the man.

Maybe, she thought, maybe at last this is the one.

"Wind it up and let it go, Lori!" someone shouted.

She picked up the beat from the drums and piano and got the grind going steadily, the upper part of her body almost motionless, the shimmering fringe around her waist swirling with the fast circular motion.

I've got to see his eyes again, she told herself. I've got to see the look.

But he kept his eyes on the bar, sitting quite motionless, staring at the drink the bartender pushed toward him. All Lori could see was his forehead and his nose, and that was not enough; she had to see his eyes. She had to see *into* his eyes, and beyond them. She had to know for sure.

The chill had left her now. She wondered why she had been affected that way, after waiting so long for so many nights, hoping for this moment. She put her hands up beneath her thick platinum hair and clasped them and began the grind. The drummer was backing her up beautifully, for once, giving her a nice even roll on the snare and a sharp rim-shot with every movement. *Goddamn it, why didn't the guy look up at her?*

She kept the grind going for a full minute, and still the man — the one who might be the answer to everything — sat staring down at the bar, not even bothering to sip at his drink.

She reached behind her back and undid the clasp that held her brassiere and let the brassiere flutter to the floor. The crowd yelled at the

sight of her bare body. All but the one man who counted. He hadn't moved, hadn't even lifted his eyes.

Lori moistened her lips. She knew how to get those eyes up fast enough, but she'd have only one chance. A few seconds, and then they'd stop her. Stop her and probably throw her out on the street. But to hell with it . . . it was the only way. She hooked her fingers in the elastic of her G-string and then, quite slowly, pushed the G-string down as far as she could and still hold on to it.

She stood poised on her high heels, the lower part of her body moving almost imperceptibly now, while the yells of the crowd hammered at her ears and the drummer built a thundering crescendo on his crash cymbals.

And now the man was looking at her. A man in his early thirties, a handsome man, with a tanned, heavy-featured face and pale eyes that stared at her unblinkingly.

And it was there. The look was there — and this was the man.

She smiled at him, but he did not smile back. His face was almost expressionless. He raised his glass and drank and put the glass back down again, and not once did the pale eyes blink or move from her body.

She let the G-string fall to the floor, and then she got the grind going again. But this was a grind like none she had ever seen or done before. She exaggerated it, making such rapid, vicious thrusts that the

entire lower part of her body began to hurt. And when she knew she had done all she could ever do, she scooped up the brassiere and G-string, slipped quickly into the nylon robe she had left on the steps leading up to the platform, and ran back through the crowd to the dressing room.

She tried not to think, not to let her mind dwell for a single moment on the possibility that she might fail. She took down the new green jersey dress and slipped it over her naked body, ran a comb hurriedly through the bright platinum of her hair, and left the room.

What if I lose him? she thought. What if he leaves before . . .

But he was still at the bar, and he glanced at her strangely as she moved past and took a table directly behind him. This was the hardest part of all, this moment of uncertainty while she sat and waited to see whether he would take the initiative. And he *had* to take the initiative. That was part of it. Everything either one of them did from now on was all part of a pattern, and it had to move in a certain way.

A man came by her table and asked to buy her a drink. She turned her shoulder to him and the man went away. Another man came and she did the same thing.

The man at the bar stood up, put a bill on the bar, and walked slowly toward her. He sat down in the chair next to her, not looking at her, and studied the backs of his broad hands.

When she was sure she could trust her voice, she said, "Did you like my dance?" She arched her back, feeling the clinging material of her dress grow taut across the upthrust breasts.

He nodded, still not looking at her. "Yeah, I liked it. What're you drinking?" His voice was pleasantly husky.

She smiled. "I don't drink."

His eyes jerked up to hers. "Quit kidding."

She looked into his eyes, deep into them, and a strange warmth filled her. It was going to be all right, she knew. She just had to play it carefully, that's all.

He was frowning at her a little now. "If you don't want a drink, maybe you'd like something to eat?"

She hesitated a moment, as if considering. "Well . . ."

"But not here," he said. "Not in this hole. I've got a car outside, though."

She smiled at him. "Well, all right. But I can't leave with you. It's against the rules."

"To hell with the rules," he said. "Let's go."

She shook her head. "I can't. But you go ahead and get the car and park it down at the corner, at Tenth and Webster. I'll be along in about fifteen minutes."

He laughed shortly. "Like hell you'll be along."

She let her smile grow warmer. "I won't stand you up, Mr. — what did you say your name was?"

"Burt," he said. "Call me Burt."

"I'll be there, Burt. It's just that I have to make it look right. The boss is awful strict."

He shrugged. "Okay, I'll take a chance. What've I got to lose?"

"Nothing," she said. "I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

He shrugged again and shouldered his way through the crowd toward the door, a tall, powerfully built man, much too well dressed for a place like this.

Lori watched him go, watched the door close behind him, and then she shut her eyes and tried to quell the nerve-tingling tension that had filled her.

He's got to be there, she thought; he's got to.

Fifteen minutes later, she got into Burt's dark sedan and pulled the door closed behind her. The wait had had the result she wanted, she saw. Burt's face was no longer expressionless; it held an eagerness now, a hunger. Her skirt had ridden up above her knees as she got into the car, and she left it that way. She moved a little closer to him, without being too obvious about it.

He started the motor and glanced at her face and then down at the white sheen of her bare thighs.

"Where'd you like to go?" he asked.

"Loring Park," she said. "Let's forget the food. It's nice in Loring Park, with the moonlight and the lagoon and all."

He grunted and eased the big car out into the traffic. He drove rapidly, and the trip to the lagoon seemed to Lori to take no time at all.

When they had parked she let him kiss her, but when he tried to go further she pushed him away.

"What the hell?" he said.

"What'd you expect?" she asked. "What do you take me for?"

"Don't give me that," he said bitterly, and this time when he reached for her she felt the hard ropes of muscles beneath his coat sleeves and the steel strength of his thick fingers.

She fought against him, knowing it would be no good, while his hands had their way with her. Then, suddenly, she let her body go limp and when his lips mashed down against hers she returned the kiss as savagely as she knew how.

"That's better," he muttered. "Now you're getting the idea."

She caught his lower lip between her teeth and bit until she felt the salty taste of blood.

He flung her from him. She twisted around quickly and jerked down the handle of the door and jumped outside. But she did not run. She stood there, waiting for him, laughing at him, taunting him.

He came out of the car, making a soft animal sound in his throat, his eyes pale and bulging in the moonlight. There was blood on his mouth and when he cursed her his teeth glinted redly.

She laughed at him and he reached

up and ripped her dress down to the waist. Then he lunged toward her, and she turned and ran. She tripped and fell and he dove for her, but she squirmed away and got her feet beneath her and ran again.

Then, when she came to a small clearing in the trees, she stopped. When he came for her again she stood very still, her head tilted a little to one side, staring at him.

His body slammed into her and she felt herself thrown back and down. And now she fought again. She had no chance and she wanted none, but fighting him was part of the pattern. It was necessary to make him do what he must do.

She lay on her back, helpless now, crushed beneath him. She felt his fingers around her throat, felt them sinking deeper and deeper into the soft flesh, and she knew it was going to be all right. He was going to follow the pattern.

She thought, ironically, of how they would pity her. How they would never realize that she had waited for him, searched in thousands of faces and eyes until she found him.

There was nothing but a warm, damp blackness now; the sound of the man's ragged breathing seemed to be coming from far away.

At last, she thought . . . at last I've found the right one. The man who will do what I haven't had the courage to do for myself . . . the man who will end the life I hate . . .

It was her last thought as she died.

FOOTPRINTS

BY FRED L. ANDERSON

A PAIR of naked footprints once saved a man's life. He had been overheard having a violent quarrel with his wife — and then his wife's nude body was found hanging from a rope fastened to a hook on the wall. The husband was immediately taken into custody, suspected of killing his wife and then trying to make it look like a suicide. However, detectives found the prints of a naked pair of feet on the polished top of a sewing machine next to the body. The footprints turned out to be those of the dead woman, and with this clue to go on, the police were able to prove that the woman had committed suicide by standing on the sewing machine, fastening the rope around her neck to the hook, and then stepping off the machine. The husband was released.

Even though footprints haven't been given too much publicity in crime cases, they provide important clues for the trained investigator.

Since most modern shoes have rubber heels and soles, the prints of these shoes can be found on all sorts of floor surfaces, as well as outdoors at the scene of a crime. Prints have been discovered on linoleum, wood floors, waxed floors, painted floors, and on paper lying on the floor.

Although heels are usually produced on the assembly-line process and are more or less alike when new, they develop individual marks and other characteristics when they are worn. There's a case on record where a safe burglar left a print of the rubber heel of his shoe in some of the insulating material of the safe, which had been spread over the floor when the safe was blown open. The metal ring in one of the holes on the heel was out of place, and by means of this identifying mark, the police were able to pick up the owner of the particular shoe and prove that he had been present at the scene of the crime.

Plaster of Paris is usually used when taking the impression of a footprint out-of-doors, and the technique of taking such impressions requires a great deal of skill. The detective has to be especially careful not to spoil the outline of the footprint while taking the cast, and, for this reason, only a thin layer of plaster is first placed on the print. Then, this layer is reinforced by adding twine, sticks, or similar material to reinforce the plaster before the next layer is placed on.

Also, a layer of shellac is usually sprayed on footprints made in earth

before the plaster is applied. After this, a thin coating of talcum is applied, and then the plaster is placed on the print. This procedure is used so that the cast can be made without disturbing even the slightest mark on the footprint.

Shellac is especially useful when taking impressions of footprints left in fine sand, dust, or other materials which might easily be disturbed and altered by the plaster. The shellac forms a thin, hard shell over the print.

If an emergency arises, and a detective doesn't have plaster of Paris, other materials can be substituted.

If the criminal has removed his shoes in order to walk quietly while committing the crime, his socks can leave identifying marks, especially if they have holes in them or have been darned. And, if the criminal walks around barefoot (as some have been known to do), the print of the naked foot is almost as good as a fingerprint.

Through their work with footprints, police devised what is known as the "walking picture," which is the entire pattern and structure of the way in which a person walks. By means of the walking picture, detectives can determine a lot of important items about the criminal. For instance, differences in the length between the steps taken usually indicates that the person limped. A person inflicted with syphilis or Parkinson's disease (both of which affect the balance) will leave a very

distinctive walking picture.

The angle at which each foot is put down is highly characteristic for each person and seldom changes in normal walking.

A walking line, which is an imaginary line connecting the inner points of both the right and left heel prints, can often give further clues to detectives. An extremely heavy person will usually walk with his feet wider apart than normal in order to balance his weight.

The average step length is 27 inches when the person is walking slowly, and about 35 inches for fast walkers. A running person will usually have a step length of over 40 inches, and the distance between the steps can be a great help in determining the height of the person who made the prints.

Using these facts, and taking other kinds of measurements of footprints in series, detectives can construct a mathematical formula which gives the walking picture in exact terms — and this can be used as a means of identification when a suspect is taken into custody.

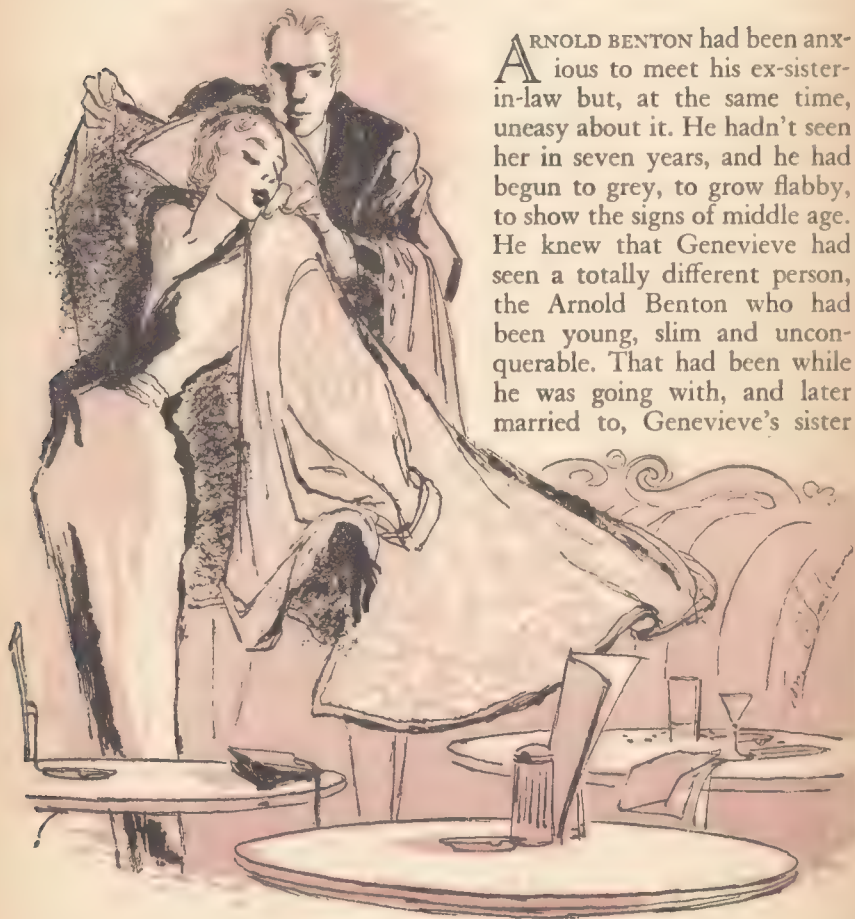
Walking pictures are being used more often, now, in order to identify criminals suspected of crimes where footprints have been left. The suspect's shoes are inked with an ordinary fingerprint roller, and the suspect is then made to walk along a length of white paper. The resulting walking picture can then be compared with the one left at the scene of the crime.

The Old Flame

*He wanted Jenny. He knew he
could make her go with him.
Then why was he afraid?*

BY JAMES T. FARRELL

ARNOLD BENTON had been anxious to meet his ex-sister-in-law but, at the same time, uneasy about it. He hadn't seen her in seven years, and he had begun to grey, to grow flabby, to show the signs of middle age. He knew that Genevieve had seen a totally different person, the Arnold Benton who had been young, slim and unconquerable. That had been while he was going with, and later married to, Genevieve's sister



Ella. Though he'd been more attracted to Genevieve. He remembered the afternoon in Minneapolis . . . he had been alone, waiting for Ella to return from shopping. It had been just before their marriage. Genevieve had been resting alone in her room. He went in and spoke to her for a few minutes.

He felt his pulse racing, his breath coming faster, and he went back into the living room, pretending to read. Suddenly he had wanted to kiss her, seduce her. Since then he had thought of that afternoon often, imagined himself seducing her.

Genevieve had always seemed to like him; even during the most painful first days of his separation from Ella he and Genevieve had remained friendly. He remembered her now as a pretty, laughing girl of seventeen. Dressing to meet her, he imagined the times he had kissed her, openmouthed and passionate. The fantasies he had created for himself. He had been disappointed at himself because he had not seduced her; he knew she hadn't been an innocent. Even at seventeen, he had known, she had been far from innocent.

Arnold Benton dressed carefully. He tried to hide the fact that he had aged at all; though he was only forty-one, he had a painfully acute sense of himself as old. He wanted her, also, to be awed by his success. He was no longer the old Arnold Benton. He was — Arnold Benton, the famous news commentator, the national figure. Millions of people

had heard his news analyses on the radio; millions knew his name, the sound of his voice. But his success and fame added to his feelings of uneasiness while he put on a new stylish suit, carefully tying his bow-tie, smoothing down the hair which was already beginning to streak with grey, patting his cheeks with after-shave lotion and, with a feeling of rectitude, using the very lotion which was manufactured by his sponsor.

He hadn't told Louise that he was meeting Genevieve. That made him a little worried: sometimes, there were slip-ups. You saw someone you knew, uttered some chance remark that created suspicion. He could have told Louise. But he knew why he hadn't.

He had, surprisingly, hopes. Definite hopes. Genevieve had gotten a room in a hotel. It would be easy to go upstairs with her . . .

But why should he? He was Arnold Benton. She was a girl from the small-town fringe of poverty.

But for two days he had thought of Genevieve. Over and over he had seen himself in her room, kissing her, making love to her. He had imagined countless conversations, trying to work out the one best approach. He hoped that she would invite him up, in fact, proposition him. He could imagine that happening, imagine her flinging herself into his arms.

Uneasy, he left his Park Avenue apartment and took a cab to meet her.

Soft music came from the radio in the wall. Arnold and Genevieve sat in a corner. To Arnold, the music brought back memories, the old memories of all he had been cheated of, the love he had wanted and, somehow, never received. It startled him for a second to realize that he was sitting, listening to the songs of his youth, talking with Genevieve here in this exclusive New York restaurant — he, Arnold Benton, who earned five thousand dollars a week!

He told himself he would sacrifice that salary, sacrifice his fame and his success, if only he could have the last twenty-three years to live over again.

"I'm very happy you called me up," he told her.

"I always liked you, Arnold. I looked forward to seeing you." She smiled.

He was unsure about how to interpret that smile; instead, he was measuring Genevieve against Louise, against the chic women he met in New York at theatres, parties, night clubs. He couldn't decide how attractive she was. He remembered thinking her beautiful as a girl, and imagined her beautiful now, but he couldn't be sure. He simply could not see her objectively enough to judge. He felt certain, though, that she was attractive enough so that he wasn't ashamed of being seen with her. She dressed well, and she had her black hair done up in the latest

style. She could, he thought, well be New York rather than Minneapolis.

"It's been a long time, hasn't it, Jenny?" he said with a sigh.

She laughed. "Too long."

He raised his Scotch and soda. They touched glasses. "To Jenny," he said.

"That's sweet of you, Arnold," she said. "But you always were sweet."

"Was I?"

"I thought so," she whispered.

For no reason at all he said, loudly, "Yes, it's been a long time."

"And you haven't changed much," she said. "You seem the same."

"Did you expect me to be changed?"

She shook her head, *no*.

"I don't think I'm changed," he said. "None of this has gone to my head," hoping he wasn't showing her how self-conscious he was.

He decided finally that he wanted her. He didn't care how dangerous it might be, he wanted her. But how could he know? She might repulse him — repulse him and then, going home, tell Ella.

"We never thought we'd be living in the kind of world we are — did we, Jenny — in the old days?" he said heavily.

"No," she answered slowly, and repeated: "No."

"Never knowing. Wondering when war will start. Always on edge."

"You're doing everything you can," she said.

"Everybody does his bit, if he's worth his damned salt," Arnold said bitterly.

Then they sat. Neither spoke. After a time she said, with a tone and a smile that reminded him of Genevieve at seventeen: "Gee, I'm so glad to see you."

"I'd have been disappointed if I'd heard you'd come to town and not looked me up."

"But Arnold, darling, you know I wouldn't do that," she said.

Arnold wondered how he could interpret her calling him *darling*. If the world really knew him, he thought, really knew Arnold Benton, how they would laugh. On the radio he seemed so confident, calm, able to talk: sure of himself. And here he sat with this — girl from Minneapolis, and didn't know what to do next.

Self-consciously, he yawned, then quickly said: "I've got a tough time."

"You must have," she said. "With the work you do. But Arnold, it's wonderful to think of your making such a name for yourself."

"I work hard, harder than a lot of people think," he said. "Got to be on my toes all the time. I usually work more than ten hours a day. No, a radio commentator's life isn't a glamorous one."

"I know, I know, Arnold," Genevieve said sympathetically.

He grinned. "Well, these aren't easy times. We're fighting for survival." He took another sip of his

drink. He stared around the restaurant, to see if he would recognize any faces. He saw no one he knew. "And you," he said. "Tell me about yourself."

Ella? he wanted to ask, but hesitated.

"Here I am," Genevieve said and laughed.

He felt her laugh was a little self-conscious. But then, she was probably trying to impress him. "Are you happy?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. You never met Sandy, did you?"

"No. No, I didn't" he said absently, then added quickly: "I'd like to."

"I'd like you to meet him," Genevieve said. "He's nice."

"How long have you been married now?"

"Five years. Gosh, the way time flies."

"Yes," Arnold agreed wistfully. He wanted to say more, but hesitated.

"And how are you?" she asked. "Married again."

"Happy," he said shortly, not wanting to talk about his own marriage. He finished his glass. He pointed to her glass and said: "Drink up, and we'll have another."

3.

"We used to have fun, didn't we?" Genevieve said.

Arnold nodded.

"Ella said for me to send you her love," she continued.

"That was nice of her. Thank her for me," Arnold said.

"She's changed."

"How?"

"She works hard. In a veteran's hospital."

"Will she ever get married again?"

"I hope so. I think she will. She's been going with Adams."

Arnold raised his eyebrows in a question.

"Oh, he's a doctor. In the hospital. He's very nice."

"That's good," he said. "I'd like to see Ella married. I guess our marriage was a mistake. But we all make mistakes."

"Ella only wishes you well. I know it."

"I wish her well," Arnold said quickly.

"And my mother, even my father, they talk differently about you, Arnold. Really, they're proud of you. They both said I should say hello for them. They are proud of you."

It was dull; but, Arnold realized, he was interested.

"Aunt Kitty had to be put away. She collapsed," Genevieve said.

"Sorry to hear that," Arnold said, again taking a sip.

"She never really forgave you. She always said you ruined the life of her niece."

Troubled, Arnold asked: "How is your father's business?"

"Oh, he's doing fine."

Arnold wanted to ask: Does he hear my radio program? But he kept

quiet for a minute. Once, he recalled, he'd had such contempt for her father . . . and now he wanted the old man to listen to him. He shook his head vaguely.

"Yes, it's a long time," he said suddenly, his thoughts confused.

"It is. But it's so good to see you, Arnold, dear."

He reached across the table and, shyly, squeezed her hand. She smiled at him. He thought: Perhaps I might . . . but I shouldn't try. Now he was free of connections with her family. Better stay that way. And if he tried and failed, suppose she went back home and told that to Ella. He could imagine Ella's knowing that, feeling happy, justified. No, he'd better not try.

He looked at Genevieve and she seemed beautiful. He realized that for years he had regretted not having tried to do anything in the old days — especially on that afternoon when they'd been alone.

The radio was still on, and he heard a dim orchestra playing *Three O'Clock in the Morning*. He'd danced to that song, with Ella. Waltzing, he had held her close, and thought he had the only girl in the world in his arms and that they would be happy together for years. And now, here he was, divorced and the famous Arnold Benton, talking with Jenny, and Ella was miles away in another city and their life was ended. And he knew that he was bitter, and he wished they had never been married.

"I always like that song," he said moodily.

"Yes, it is nice," she said.

He wished he could take Jenny in his arms and waltz with her to the tune.

He began to feel cheated. Life had not given him what he had hoped for, what he could have had. He remembered himself in his late teens and early twenties, hopeful and eager and expectant. He had wanted love and fame. And he had gotten — love, and fame. Thinking of this, he realized that Ella had given him what love she had to give. But it had not, somehow, been enough. Often, in the last few years, he'd thought of this, imagined that there was something hollow and empty in his life. And now, the old song seemed to tell that to him; for a moment, it almost filled something of that empty hole at the center of his personality.

Quickly, he took a drink. He had to talk. If he sat here like this, Jenny would think he might not be happy, she'd think something was wrong and she wouldn't have the impression of him that he wanted her to have. He didn't know quite what that impression would be, other than that he wanted Jenny to admire him, to think that he was unchanged and unspoiled by money and success and prominence, and that he was happy and satisfied.

"You don't have any children?" she asked him.

"No," he said, shaking his head.

"I should have thought you would want children," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"You're so kind; you'd make a good father."

He smiled. Pleased, he was immediately more confident.

Perhaps, he thought, he was getting somewhere. Perhaps he could risk something here.

"Tell me more about yourself," he said.

"Oh, there isn't so much to tell. We're all happy, we get along fine. Ella gets on well with Mother."

"How is your mother?"

"Oh, she isn't so well. She has attacks of rheumatism. But she does get around, and she and Dad are as so happy together."

"That's good," he said, sentimentally thinking that her parents were, after all, examples of the real virtues of the American Way of Life. He had been wrong about them in his youth, wrong in the contempt he had felt for them. Theirs was the real life, the kind of life he wanted. And yet, he thought, people like himself were needed, those who were more sophisticated, and who not only received more of the rewards of life but also sacrificed more, worried more, carried more burdens.

"I like your parents," he said.

"They'll be happy when I tell them that," Genevieve said.

"Let's have another drink," he said.

"All right." She smiled at him.

"Arnold, I like you," she said, still

smiling. The smile seemed inviting, liquid, willing.

He reached across the table and took her hand, squeezed it.

"You're a darling, Arnold," she told him.

He signalled for the waiter. If they had a few drinks, everything would be easier, and then, if anything uncomfortable or troublesome did happen, he could always say that he had had some drinks, and that he had done what he had because of the drinks.

4.

She took his arm.

"Gee, it's nice to be with you, to see you again," she told him.

He smiled, puffed up with pleasure. It was a Spring day. The air was fine and balmy. The fine quality of the Spring air stirred him. He had always felt so hopeful in the Spring, and now, he was too old for that. And yet, he asked, why was he? He was with Jenny, and they were going back to her hotel, and they would have an attractive adventure. Jenny was married; she wouldn't make any demands on him; there was no danger. He was going to have just the kind of adventure he had always wanted, especially in the Spring.

They walked along Fifth Avenue, past Rockefeller Center. The avenue was crowded and noisy. He saw many well-dressed people, well-dressed and stunning women. And Jenny was

well-dressed, and he could walk with her as one of the crowd on Fifth Avenue. He wanted to be recognized but, at the same time, he was afraid that the wrong person would recognize him. He felt a part of this Fifth Avenue crowd; it was part of his world. The shops on the avenue were the shops in which he and his wife bought. Nearby were the night-clubs to which they went, and the studio from which he broadcasted. He was one of the famous men in the land, and Fifth Avenue stood as a background to his fame. He imagined how proud Jenny must feel, hanging on his arm, walking down Fifth Avenue with him.

He had told her that he wanted to get out, and then he had said he would go back to her hotel room with her and talk there. It would be so much more pleasant talking there than in a restaurant with music playing . . .

And she had given him that same, inviting, liquid smile. He was sure they understood each other. In the old days, he had imagined a rivalry between Genevieve and Ella, and he guessed they must be rivals still. Perhaps that was why Jenny was willing . . .

He walked calmly, head erect, his face rather solemn. He had an air of importance about him, and he imagined that his posture, his gait, his expression, as well as his carefully selected clothing, all bespoke his importance.

They walked with long strides.

"This is nice. It's nice seeing you, Arnold, you nice old thing," she said girlishly.

5.

"This is a nice big room," he said, taking his hat and grey topcoat off and setting them carefully on a chair.

The hotel room was large, and it had been furnished carefully, in a manner suggesting a Hollywood hotel-room setting. The walls were a pure white, and most of the furniture, modern in design, was blue. The curtains were white with blue dots. The room was sunny.

He sat on the bed and sighed. He had felt nervous for a moment as they had come up in the elevator, afraid he would be recognized.

She sat on the bed beside him, ran her hand through his hair, and said: "It's wonderful to see you, Arnold, you darling."

"Is it?" he asked meaningfully.

"For me it is," she said.

He took her hand, put his arm around her shoulders. He kissed her, at first shyly and tentatively. But she did not resist him, and they kissed passionately. Then he knew that he had her as a conquest and, holding her in his arms, their lips sealed together in a long-drawn-out kiss, he thought of her as a conquest and grew tense. He had made a mistake, he didn't know how to get out of his error . . .

Suddenly she laughed.

He shrank from her laugh. She was making a fool of him, and when she went back to Minneapolis Ella would know everything. The famous Arnold Benton had been trapped and made to look like a fool.

"I forgot to lock the door," she said, and she immediately got up and went to the door.

He heard her locking the door.

He lay waiting, indecisive. He tried to convince himself that he was drunk, at least slightly drunk. He knew better. He wanted her, but he did not want to be held responsible. He wished that he were more drunk, drunk enough so that he could really feel convinced that it was not he making any choice.

She lay beside him, put her arms around him. Suddenly he reached out with a hand and pulled her to him brutally. His hand ripped the dress down her back, and against him he could feel her shudder.

"Arnold," she said. "Arnold . . ."

6.

He was less nervous now, seated with her in the little bar. He could not understand why he had wanted to get out of her room so quickly, why he had not wanted to lie there with her, perhaps take her again, relax, fall quietly asleep.

He raised his glass, tipped it to hers, and smiled weakly. He didn't know now what to say. He thought he should have said: *To us*.

He couldn't. They were no *us*.

"I never dreamed this would happen," she said.

He smiled again. "It did," he told her, but without spirit.

Yet once more he grinned. Nervous, having to do something distracting, he took a drink and then lit a cigarette. "Are you sorry?" he asked finally.

She shook her head.

"I'm not," he told her.

It was untrue. In the very act, he had been sorry, and so agitated that he had found no enjoyment. Now he wished that they were back in the room, and that, relieved somehow, he were enjoying her.

"You always were sweet," she said.

"And so were you."

She said: "You married the wrong sister, didn't you, Arnold, dear?"

He shivered. For a moment, he was speechless. He was her victim. She wanted him, now. He had been trapped.

"I was young," he said evasively.

"When I go back home, Arnold, I'll think of you — nicely," she said.

She pursed her lips in a kiss that she blew to him. She was beautiful. He relaxed, slumping a little in the booth, and realized that she was not trapping him, that he could permit himself to smile. He felt a flood of tender feelings for her. They had given each other a few minutes of forgetfulness. Now, he thought how he worked, under such a strain, how he carried a burden of worry and how he needed forgetfulness, the

forgetfulness that came with some new and adventurous experience. And this was something that he could thank her for.

He could have had her years ago. Regret for the lost opportunities, for his past years, his lost years, saddened him. He imagined the people who listened to him: to them, he was only a voice. Behind that voice, he told himself, there was something very lonely, so lonely that he felt separated from people. But he had been close to Jenny. — Hadn't he?

He felt sorry for himself as he lifted his glass and drank.

"You're very quiet," she said.

He nodded his head, wanting to say something but unable to think of anything he might, appropriately, say.

"I always knew I gave satisfaction," she said with a grin.

The sentence disturbed him, even though it gave him more ease. He saw from it that this time was not first since her marriage. He remembered that she had been free, perhaps promiscuous, as a girl, and he saw that she hadn't changed. He had no need to worry. She wouldn't cause him trouble.

He nodded, reached across the table, took her hand and squeezed it. He was grateful to her; but he could not shake off a gloom, a nervous anxiety that had begun again to trouble him. He needed to be alone.

He fumbled for his watch, looked

at it and, trying to conceal his embarrassment, told her: "I have to go now, darling."

She rose. She was casual. He paid and they went outside. He shook hands with her. "You're here how long, Jenny?" he asked.

"Until Friday."

"I'll phone you." He paused. "The day after tomorrow. I'm tied up tomorrow."

"I'd like to see you again," she said.

"If I can, you will," he said, squeezed her hand, and left her.

7

He had plenty of time before he went to the broadcasting studio. He only needed to be there an hour before his broadcast. That would give him plenty of time to go over the dispatches and prepare his own; he'd learned how to put his reports in shape in the quickest possible time.

He walked back to Fifth Avenue and started uptown, pleased at being an anonymous part of the crowded procession of people. It was between four and five. The day was warm, and the noise and movement of the street seemed friendly. He was where he felt he must belong. Yet, there was something which suddenly began to gnaw at him.

Suppose she became pregnant? She had a husband, of course, but if she should make charges against him he could be ruined. He remembered one case he'd read of, a

long time ago . . . he stood in the center of the sidewalk while people passed him, and he blanched. He felt the perspiration under his armpits. He was, temporarily, incapable of controlling himself, and he stood terrified, the color gone from his cheeks.

He suddenly realized that he was standing still in public, and that if anyone who recognized him saw him, he would become an object of gossip. He took a few steps, wanting to walk briskly. But he walked very slowly, his mind filled with visions of disgrace and scandal. He told himself he would be mentioned in the gossip columns. He walked on, and suddenly everything became much worse as he realized that he had always wanted to have an illegitimate child. Now he didn't, and yet he had often imagined himself as the father, not only of one illegitimate child, but of many.

He walked on. The noise of traffic was muffled by his fears, and he grew more afraid. He crossed a street with a crowd, not knowing where he was. He shook his head as though that little gesture would restore a sense of inner balance, and walked on in terror.

8.

Louise was more beautiful than Jenny. Why should he have wanted Jenny?

"Arnold, you seem strange," Louise said to him.

They were seated in a large restaurant, and soft music was playing somewhere.

"I was thinking. I was absorbed," he said.

"I understand. But you shouldn't take the world's problems so hard, so personally. We'll win out, finally. We have to."

He nodded. "Yes. Life would be unbearable if we didn't believe that. All the misery, the suffering . . . if only we could really do something." And he felt guilt; he felt he should be doing more than talking.

But men such as he were indispensable, he told himself. And besides, there was nothing anyone could do, nothing more than he was doing. The Cold War would drag on and on, but there was nothing he could do. He realized why he had felt guilty: it was because he didn't know whether he wanted to do anything. He had been sure; but now he felt that if he did anything he would ruin all chance of success for everyone. He wouldn't dare to do anything.

He had to cover up, for Louise. But he wasn't doing anything wrong, was he? He said: "I need a drink. This strain is killing me."

"Yes, I know, dear," she said, but her tone sounded too casual.

He signalled to the waiter with an air of authority and impatience. "Two Daiquiris," he said, flushing with passing pride at the way in which he could order drinks.

"What's new?" she asked.

"Nothing. Nothing. Another refusal by the Russians. It can't go on forever," Arnold said.

"I meant personally," she added.

He was under a strain, unable to trust himself to lie. "Nothing, nothing at all," he said curtly.

"What's the matter, Arnold? You seem so grumpy," she said.

"Nothing. Nothing. Nerves. After all, I do work under a strain," he said.

The waiter brought the drinks. He was glad to get his; drinking, then smoking, he was a little more relaxed. He had an impulse to tell Louise about Jenny, but he said nothing. He looked forward to months of worry before he could be sure. But he could trust Jenny. It had been a passing, a pleasing adventure, and she had been no more serious than he.

What the devil was he worrying about?

It was the spirit of the times. Even though he lived comfortably, at home, with his wife, he felt the insecurity of the world. Perhaps he was affected even more strongly because he did not carry a gun. He suddenly wished that he were in the armed services.

"I didn't do much today. It's no longer any pleasure to shop in these crowds." She paused. "And prices . . ."

"We've got to keep our defenses up," he said curtly.

"Yes, dear, I know that, but can't I just talk about trivial things some-

times? You used to like me to."

"I still do. I think that I worry about the world too much. I wish it were all over, and we could all relax."

"Sometimes I think it will never end," she said.

"We've had hard sledding, but we've got to win out in the end."

Then they sat, sipping their drinks. After they finished, Arnold took charge of the ordering. He ordered with care and competence, gratified at his ability to order. The restaurant was more crowded, and the music from somewhere was a waltz. The atmosphere pleased him. He could forget so much over a good meal. But tonight he was not forgetting.

"I wish it were all over," Louise sighed.

Arnold realized that though he and Louise were living together in love as man and wife, they did not, except rarely, tell each other what they really thought and felt. In fact, he saw, he told no one what he really thought and felt. He was not sure. He had the feeling that there was a real Arnold Benton, lost behind the Arnold Benton who was known, the Arnold Benton known to those thousands and hundreds of thousands as a name and a voice. He didn't know what this real Arnold Benton was, but he believed implicitly and with conviction in his existence. This real and unknown Arnold Benton was unsatisfied. There was no reason why one in his wordly position should be unsatisfied. He

was. Something was wrong. But he concentrated on eating, because if there was anything wrong he didn't really want to face it.

"Considering the prices, the food isn't so bad," he said, aware that they had been eating with silence between them.

"No, it isn't. Everything has gone down in quality, and you have to pay tremendous amounts to get anything good. But then, we're better off than people anywhere else. We can't complain."

"That's true."

They went on eating and talking casually, and about banal matters.

9.

They sat over coffee. They were going to a theatre, and they had time.

"I think a brandy would go nicely," he said.

"Yes, I'd love one," she said, smiling.

He noticed her beauty, and was proud of it. She seemed smart, too. So much smarter, so much more sophisticated than Jenny . . . he realized that there was a great difference, of course, in favor of Louise. And yet, he was afraid that he would see Jenny again before she left. He thought gloomily that he could not control himself, that something was happening to him which he didn't will, and he was ashamed of himself. It was the world, convention, that was wrong, not he himself. He

drowned the feeling of shame that he had suddenly become aware of, and did not pursue his thoughts further. He didn't want to think.

He did so much thinking, he assured himself, in his job, that when he was away from it he needed to relax.

The waiter came, and Arnold became imperious and formal as he ordered brandy for himself and Louise. They sat, and Arnold kept looking off nervously, not wanting to look his wife directly in the eye.

"Yes, it would be so wonderful if the whole Cold War were just — over," she said. ♦

"It's got to blow up sooner or later," he said, with a curious pride and, at the same time, with a certain note of brutality. It was as if his words were a punishment he was wreaking on Louise.

"I just want peace, that's all," she said.

"The world does. The world is tired. Everybody is tired," he said, knowing in a vague way that he was really saying this in order to excuse himself and to prepare her in case she found out.

She nodded.

The waiter came with the brandy. They sipped it slowly.

Arnold didn't know what to talk about. He wanted to be off by himself. He was pleased when he remembered that they were going to the theatre that night, because he could sit alone, not required to talk.

Louise sighed

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked.

"Nothing; I just sighed," she said.

He nodded his head, profoundly. He looked anxiously at his watch and said: "We'll drink the brandy and go."

She nodded. "I always like to get there early, and watch the people come. People in theatre lobbies fascinate me. I can't stand people who come late and disturb everybody finding their seats."

"They don't think of others when they do that," Arnold said.

"I just can't stand them," she said, taking another sip.

Arnold held the glass, almost caressingly, and then sniffed the liquor, took the blown balloon-like glass up with both hands and sipped. He set it down with an expression of comfort and contentment.

"In a little while we'll get a new car," Louise said.

He nodded, but he almost winced. He discovered that he was afraid of the future, of any future, even a future of assured peace. The confidence that he expressed to the thousands of listeners he talked to every night was not the confidence he felt. He was not sure of himself, or of the world he lived in. He didn't know how he had gotten where he was, and he was afraid of not staying in his present high position. And somehow, this lack of confidence was connected with the way he felt after having been with Jenny that afternoon.

He shook his head vaguely. They sat and sipped their brandy, and he wanted only to be at the theatre where he could watch and be entertained and forget. He thought that he had to go on and on, always without the confidence to sustain him. If only he had married Jenny and settled down to a simple provincial life. If only he had not had the ambitions which had carried him to where he was now. He yearned for the past, for simplicity.

They finished their brandy, and

he paid. They left, got a cab, and sat riding in the cab silently. He looked out at people on the sidewalks as though they were different from him, inevitably and irreversibly separated. Why should he feel this way? Why shouldn't he feel, instead, joy and confidence and a sense of power?

"I hope it's an amusing play," he said.

"It got rave notices," she said.

They sat side by side in the cab, saying nothing.



HE FINALLY stopped fingering his breakfast toast. "I'm sorry about last night, Eva."

"Sorry?" The frost was still on her voice. "That's getting to be a used-up word, Joe. Like my patience. Listen to you, you'd think I was no good, or —."

"You know I don't mean that."

"All I know is, I can't even say



A Clear Picture

It was proven, now. All he had left to do was complete his plan, and kill her.

BY SAM S. TAYLOR

'thank you' to a grocery clerk nowadays, without your getting green."

He fingered the toast again. "Why don't you ask Larry Buff over for dinner tomorrow?"

Disbelief whipped his wife's glance up from her coffee. "You kidding? After the insinuations you made about him and me last night?"

"No. I was all wrong about that, Eva. I know you were just trying to help the poor guy forget his loneliness, what with his wife back east, and everything. Go ahead, ask him over. It'll do him good." He added, with a faint grin, "Me too, maybe."

A slow-forming smile erased the scorn from her languidly pretty face. "Honest, Joe, if it wasn't for that damn jealous streak of yours, you could be real cute." She reached over and tiptoed slender fingers across the back of his hand. "You know you never have to worry about little Eva."

He patted her own hand. "I know that."

Sure. The way a bank doesn't have to worry about a vault with a broken lock. Not that he could pin anything definite on her. Eva was plenty smart, but she wasn't slipping anything past him. He knew what was behind those little sly touches he'd made mental notes of for the past year.

Driving to the plant, the memory of them crowded his mind again. A shaded look at some younger guy across a bar; a wisp of playful smile; a lingering handclasp; a muted phone conversation when he was supposed to be shaving. Those recurring excuses about coming home too late to cook dinner. And that touching solicitude she'd been showing lately for Larry Buff. How dumb was a husband supposed to be?

No, he couldn't prove anything . . . not yet.

During the lunch hour he went over to the Stadium, in Hollywood. He stepped up to the ticket window, slipping a ten-dollar bill through the opening. "How about a pair in Section D, for tomorrow night's fights?"

"Man, you're asking the impossible. All the ham actors in Hollywood have those seats reserved. That's the section that faces the television cameras."

"Keep the change, and take a real good look, huh?"

The man took the bill, and a pair of tickets came up from an unseen drawer. "Second row. Fourth and fifth in. Guess I'm everybody's friend today."

"Sure. Thanks."

That's what Joe liked about the world. Full of friends. Like Larry Buff, for instance. There was a tight smile as he glanced at the tickets again.

He didn't spring it on them until half way through dinner the next evening. "Almost forgot. The boss gave me a pair of tickets for the fights tonight." He displayed them, flipping the tickets to the younger man opposite. "How about you taking Eve? I'd just as leave stay home and catch up on some work."

He was sure he detected a trace of color in Buff's face. "Oh, I couldn't do that, Joe. Nice enough as it is asking me to dinner, but you two —"

"Look. You'll be doing me a favor. Honest. Eve likes fights, and

I really want to finish this work."

He watched Eva's hand glide over and pat her guest's sleeve. "That's right, Larry. You'll be giving him a break. Joe's probably happy to get me out of his hair for an evening." Nice clean humor. Family style. All she was doing was making up Buff's mind.

After dinner when they were alone for a minute, she came over and ran fingers through his thinning hair. "Joe, you're really beginning to surprise me."

He tried to match her easy smile. "That's right, honey. Just beginning."

The first preliminary was just getting under way when he switched on the television an hour later. His eyes found the second row and counted off the fourth and fifth seat. They were empty. That didn't mean much yet. The crowd was just beginning to stream in. When the next bout started, only a half dozen vacant seats showed at the opposite side of the ring. Two of them, the pair from which his glance rarely shifted, began to assume dimension.

In a sea of meaningless faces, they were two huge blobs of hateful light by the time the main bout was announced. Second row. Fourth and fifth in. Empty as a treacherous woman's love. The thought pulled another wire tight inside of him.

He knew he could turn the set off, but he allowed it to play on, scarcely conscious now of the moving shadows on the lighted tube. A ring

announcer tossed a disc into the air, while two heavyweights watched impassively. The disc dropped to the canvas, rolled a few feet, then fell black side up. The announcer motioned to one of the boxers who went to the black corner. It was a good fight for six rounds, then the boy in the white corner stopped a lethal left hook and the broadcast was over.

He appeared to be reading a newspaper when his wife returned shortly after midnight. He said, without looking up, "How were the fights?"

"Swell. Main bout was terrific."

"Yeah? Who won?"

"Chavez. Knocked out Delaney in the sixth."

"Heard it all on the radio, huh?"

"Radio?" She looked at him uncertainly. "Why, I was there, wasn't I?"

"Were you?" He tossed the paper aside.

She caught the implication in his mocking smile. "Oh, so that's it. Getting ideas about me again. Well, for your information, we were at the Stadium all evening. If you want proof —"

"That's what I've got, Eva. Proof."

"What do you mean by that crack?"

"You're lying when you say you went to the fights —"

"Joe, you better stop right now."

"Lying. Just like you've been doing for months. Figured me for

a pigeon, didn't you? Well, I was on to you a long time ago, Eva. Only you didn't know it. All I needed was the goods. I got it tonight, baby. Right on that television set."

He knew what was behind that glance that edged furtively toward the console. He was on top now. This was becoming almost pleasurable. "There were two empty seats staring me in the face all night, Eva. Down front where I couldn't miss them. That's why I bought those seats. Just to hear my little soulmate come home and say she'd spent the past four hours at the fights."

The woman's face flushed, but she held back the first rush of words. Instead she reached for the coat she had recently draped over a chair. "That's the straw that does it, Joe. I'm leaving now. I'll send for my things tomorrow. You better find yourself a psychiatrist. That jealous streak of yours is getting malignant." She started for the door.

A couple of more wires broke inside of him. They were snapping all over now. He moved quickly to her side, grabbing her wrist in a vicious hold. "Walking out on me, huh? Just like that." The other hand dug into her throat. "Who were the others, Eva?"

"You crazy, Joe? You're hurting—"

"Come on, come on. Who were they?"

"There've never been any. You know that. I swear —"

"Liar. Rotten little liar." Each finger was an avenging angel now.

"Joe . . . in the name of —"

When the flash fire inside his head finally consumed itself, he lowered the limp body to the floor. He hadn't meant to kill her, but it was done now. In the sudden untensing of his own body, there was a feeling not unlike relief, as though a thousand tormentors, long gathering within him, had been killed in the same act. This was a time for calm thought. It would take as much shrewdness in disposing of her body as it had in trapping Eva.

He knew just the place. High up in the remote Angelus mountains. Tomorrow would be the time, when he got back from the plant. Meanwhile, he could hide her in the attic.

Art Visalia picked him up the next morning. The two men shared a car pool arrangement. Art said, "Catch the fights on TV last night?"

"Yeah."

"Packed house, wasn't it? Announcer said only six seats were empty."

"Yeah."

"Great card. Picture was a lot sharper, too. You noticed?"

"Yeah."

"Leave it to that kid of mine. He figured out the reason, right off."

"Don't say."

"Sure. The kid's really hep. End of the second bout when he loses another nickel to me on the black

corner, he says something must be screwy. The black corner is on the far side of the screen, he says, when it always used to be on the near side. I said he's nuts, so he calls up the station. Hey, you listening?"

Joe nodded mechanically, the man's boresome chatter hardly penetrating.

Art rambled on, "Sure enough, they tell him the technicians decided to set up their cameras on the north side, instead of the south side of the Stadium, like they done previous."

"Well, that's the way it goes. Got to change things once in a while." He stared abstractedly through the windshield for a few more blocks, then a tiny glow that had been expanding in his dull mind suddenly boomed into a sunburst

of terrible comprehension. The announcer had said there'd been no empty seats on the other side. "Art. That switching cameras that way —"

"Uh-huh."

"Does that mean if you'd been looking for some . . . some star who always had the same seat on the far side . . . you would have missed him last night?"

"Why, certainly. The whole screen was reversed. Get the drift now?"

"Yeah . . . yeah, I get it." There was dead air for a while, then Joe said, "Let me off up there at DeLongpré."

"DeLong —? Nothing up there but the police station."

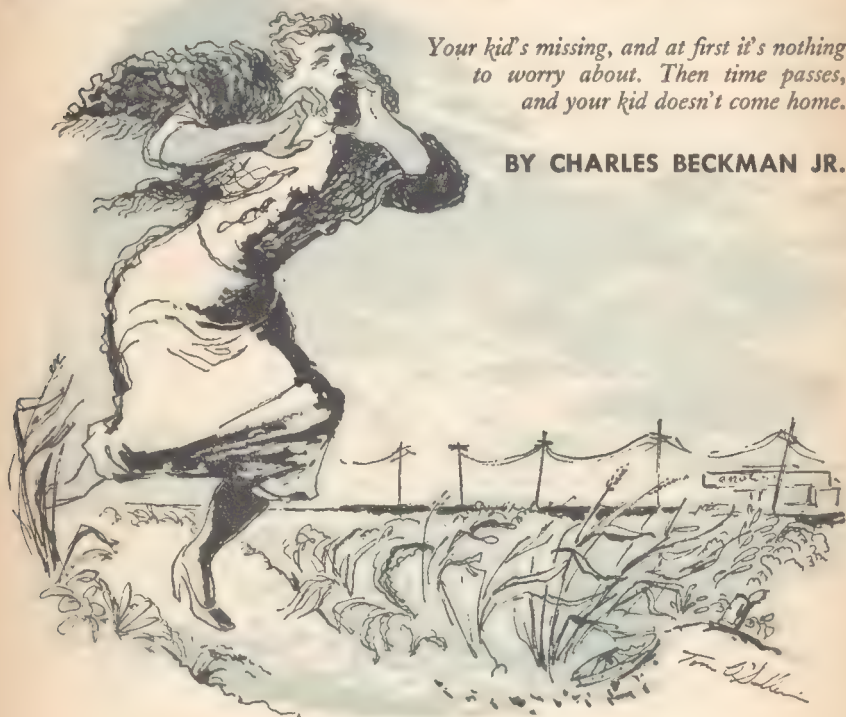
Joe drew in his lips. There was a deep sigh. "I know."



you know what *I Did?*

Your kid's missing, and at first it's nothing to worry about. Then time passes, and your kid doesn't come home.

BY CHARLES BECKMAN JR.



You know what it's like? You come home from work. Your housekeeper meets you at the door. Her face is white and she looks scared. She tells you she's been hunting your kid for two hours. He's lost somewhere in the neighborhood. Nobody knows where he is.

You know what it's like?

Maybe you don't. Maybe you'd

have to have a kid of your own. Maybe you've got to feel the awful fear, knotting up like a cold, sick lump inside you. Then maybe you'd know. Maybe.

You'd know how it is to keep telling your housekeeper that she's silly for getting so frightened over such a little thing. And all the time you're trying to keep her from see-

ing how scared you are, yourself. She's a motherly old soul and you know she thinks as much of the kid as you do.

You tell her to keep her shirt on, that he'll probably be home in a few minutes. You tell her you'd have a beer in the kitchen and if he didn't show up by the time you've finished, well, then you'll wander out and pick him up.

And all the time you're having the beer, your throat is half paralyzed and the beer chokes you because you're having a hell of a time swallowing. You're putting on an act, see. Telling your housekeeper that it's nothing to be afraid about, and you really know it's plenty to be afraid about.

Well, I went through it, so I know what it's like, believe me. I stood there that day, choking down the beer as if nothing were really wrong. And while I drank it, I asked questions of Mrs. Perry, the plump, middle-aged lady who had kept house and taken care of Tommy since Peggy, my wife, died two years ago. I tried to sound casual, asking them, but I had to fight from screaming at her.

"When did Tommy leave?"

"He — he went out to play after his nap. About three o'clock." She looked at me with those big, scared eyes of hers. They were begging for reassurance. But I was scared, see, and trying to cover it up. So I yelled at her. It made me feel better to get sore at her.

"You ought to watch the kid better. What were you doing — yapping on the phone?"

"Mr. Allen. . ." she whispered, her lips trembling and her eyes filling. Not because I'd really hurt her feelings, yelling at her that way. But because now she knew I was scared too, and that frightened her worse. She loved Tommy as much as I did.

"So he went out to play." I got my voice calmed down. I took a breath. "Where? In the back yard?"

"He went next door. To play with the Martin children. You know, little Billy and Helen, the twins. You know them, Mr. Allen."

I knew them. Nice little youngsters. Nice family. Nothing wrong with Tommy going over there.

"So, when did you notice he was missing?"

"A — about an hour later. I'd heard them playing. I glanced through the window several times to check on them. They were in the sand pile, playing just fine. Then I put some clothes in the Bendix. I came to the kitchen window and looked out again. T — Tommy wasn't with them any more."

"You mean the Martin kids were still in the sand pile, but Tommy wasn't there?"

She nodded mutely. She swallowed and grabbed ahold of the edge of the drainboard so tightly the skin nearly broke across her knuckles. "I went out and asked them where Tommy was. They didn't want to tell me at first, but finally, they said

they'd had a fuss. You know how kids are. Tommy had gone off, they said. They thought he'd just walked through their back yard to the lot behind their house."

"That was two hours ago? Well, why the hell didn't you call me at the office?"

"Oh, Mr. Allen! If I called you every time Tommy wandered out of sight you'd spend your whole day chasing home. I didn't think anything about it for a while. So they'd had a fuss and Tommy walked off — there wasn't anything in that, was there?"

"Well, what did you do?"

"I went after him, of course. I went through the back lot, calling him. He wasn't anywhere around. There's a trail that leads clear through to the next block. It's a short cut I take sometimes when I go after groceries. Tommy's been with me a dozen times, but he's never gone out of the lot before, by himself."

She took a breath. "I began getting a little worried, then. There's a lot of traffic in that next block. Then it came to me that maybe he'd walked down to the store at the corner — you know, where I get my groceries. He's been there with me before, so just maybe he went there. I walked to the store and asked Mr. Powell, the checker at the store. He told me that Tommy had been there all right, looking at the candy counter. He looked at it for a long time, and tried to buy some. But he didn't

have any money. Finally, he turned around and left. . . ."

"Yeah. Then what did you do? Did anybody else see him?"

Her voice grew small and her eyes contracted and drew in on themselves. "I kept wandering around, calling him. I went up and down the block. I walked five, six blocks in each direction. I went to the vacant lot a half dozen times. Mr. Allen — I was getting frantic." She bent over the sink, covering her face with her hands and shaking.

You know, sometimes I wish I were a woman. It must be a big relief to be able to cry like that and get some of the tension out of you.

I walked out of the kitchen. I saw Tommy's room from the hall. Through the door, I could see his pop-gun leaning against a wall, his teddy bear on the bed, his little blue jeans draped over a chair, a pair of his scuffed shoes under the bed. You forget how little those shoes are until a time like this.

I stood there looking at them for a minute, and then I went down to the end of the hall and picked up telephone.

"Hello, Police Headquarters . . . ?"

They sent a nice guy down. He was a heavy set man with a big red face that was ugly in a friendly, reassuring way. He told me that he had kids of his own and that made me glad they had sent somebody like him.

His name was Lieutenant Mart Cody.

He got all the dope from Nancy and me; it took maybe five minutes.

"You look after the child?" he asked Mrs. Perry.

Nancy nodded mutely. I explained, "Nancy Perry has been keeping house for me and looking after Tommy since Peggy — that's my wife — died. Peggy died two years ago."

He nodded. "Well, it's after six o'clock now. Has the youngster ever stayed out this late before, Nancy?"

"No — never."

"Hmm. And your're sure nobody saw him after he talked with that grocery store checker?"

"I asked everybody around there. I stopped people on the street. They didn't — nobody saw him. . . ."

"And you're sure he isn't in the habit of runnin' away? Some little boys get it in their heads to go see the world at that age."

"No, he wasn't like that. Tommy never did things like that, I tell you. He never stayed away before. . . ." Her voice was getting high-pitched and ragged.

Lieutenant Cody went to the telephone and made calls to the hospitals, the morgue and to the station to see if any little lost boys had been picked up.

I sat there thinking about what all could happen to a little guy six years old. I thought about abandoned ice boxes, hit and run drivers, kidnappers, perverts. . . .

Cody came back. "Nothing there. I think I'll go down and have a chat with that grocery clerk who saw the boy last. You want to come along, Mr. Allen?"

What do you think?

I delayed him long enough to call our doctor and ask him to come over and give Nancy something to keep her from going to pieces. Then I followed him out to his police car.

We drove to the grocery store and asked for the clerk named Powell. They told us that he had already left for the day. We got his address and drove to the place he lived, a second story flat in a run-down neighborhood. Cody rapped on his door and pretty soon it opened.

"Yes?"

The grocery checker, Powell, stood in the doorway with the light behind him. He was a tall, slender man, nearly bald, about forty. He was wearing an undershirt, rumpled pants and bedroom slippers. We could smell cabbage boiling in his kitchen.

Cody took out his billfold, flapped it open so his badge showed. Powell turned a bit pale.

"Hey, what's the matter?" He looked from Cody to me. "What's wrong?"

"Who is it, Will?" His wife came into the room. She was cooking supper and her face was flushed and damp from the warmth of the kitchen and she was wiping her hands on her apron.

"I don't know," Powell said to her. He turned back to us.

"You know me, don't you?" I asked him. "We trade at the store where you work. My housekeeper is Mrs. Nancy Perry, a plump, middle-aged lady. She takes care of my little boy, Tommy. My name is Joe Allen."

He looked a little relieved. "Oh, sure. Mrs. Perry. Sure, I know her, Mr. Allen. Haven't seen you in the store much, but Mrs. Perry comes in almost every day with little Tommy. What's the matter, Mr. Allen? Is something wrong?"

"His little boy is missing," Lieutenant Cody said.

"Tommy? Well, say, your housekeeper was in asking about him this afternoon, Mr. Allen. Golly, I thought she'd found him by now. I'm sure sorry . . . you must be worried."

"Yeah, we're worried all right. It's past dark now."

"Look," said Cody, "Miss Perry said that you saw the boy about four o'clock this afternoon."

"Oh, yessir, I did. I told Miss Perry that he'd been in the store, looking at the candy counter. He had himself quite an order in mind, and I spoiled everything by telling him you've got to have money to buy that stuff."

"Then what'd he do?" I was standing just inside the door and I had my fists in my pockets. They were like ice.

"Well, he just walked out. You

know, we're busy that time of day and I didn't pay much attention."

Cody had a pair of eyes like blue chisels. They probed at Powell's face, digging under the surface. "Try to think hard, man. You're the last person who saw that little boy. It's mighty important that you remember everything. Try to think if you can tell us anything else that might help."

By now, Mrs. Powell was standing beside her husband and he automatically put his arm around her. He was frowning and looking down at the floor. Then he suddenly snapped his fingers. "By damn, I do remember glancing toward the front door right after that and seeing Tommy leave. Funny, I hadn't thought about it until now. You know, so many little things happen during the day at a big store, you just don't keep them all in your mind. But I recall now that Tommy went through the doors and started talking to a man out on the sidewalk."

Cody's eyes got sharper. "Do you remember what this man looked like, Mr. Powell?"

The grocery clerk chewed on his lip. "Well, I just got a glimpse. I remember he had kind of reddish hair and he was wearing a loud plaid sport jacket. That's all I can remember about him."

"Could you place what age he was?"

"N-o-o-o. I just didn't pay that much attention."

The policeman nodded. "Thanks, Powell. That may help some."

His wife moved up to me and put her hand on my arm. "If there's anything we can do, Mr. Allen. . . ."

I thanked her and then followed Cody downstairs and we got in the Police car. We didn't say anything, but Cody was wearing a grim look now and we were both thinking the same thing. I had to roll the window down because I was getting sick at the stomach.

We drove around until he came to a drug store with a telephone booth. In there, Cody phoned my home. The doctor was with Nancy. Tommy hadn't come back. Cody came back out to the car and called headquarters on his radio. We gave them a description of Tommy and they put out a general alarm. He also asked for a list of known sex offenders who lived in this section of town and who had red hair.

While we were waiting for that to come through, we drove slowly along the dark streets. Cody had the searchlight on, flicking it from one side to the other, into doorways and alleys.

"Like hunting a needle in a haystack," he muttered.

We drove around like that for fifteen minutes. Then his radio gave a rasping sound and the information he requested about the sex offenders came through. He jotted their names and addresses on a pad. I watched him write.

George LaRosa, 1235 Cambridge,

and Aleck Spiegel, 819 Fourth Avenue."

They had both been arrested in the past for molesting children. Spiegel had served time, twice. LaRosa was a first offence and had been given a suspended sentence. They both had red hair and they both lived in this part of town.

"It's a long shot," Cody told me. "Hard to keep a perfect check on them all. They move around. And it could be somebody we don't know about. . . I'll check on these two birds, anyway."

We drove along. Cold, sticky beads of sweat were breaking out all over me. I got to thinking about Peggy, and wishing she were here tonight. It's a hell of a responsibility for a widower to raise a kid, even with a swell person like Nancy to help. I sat there, watching the searchlight play around and tried hard to think how to pray.

Lieutenant Cody was talking as he drove, playing the light around and looking for street numbers. We passed a vacant lot. Then we both saw it at the same time. He had the car stopped and we were both out before I consciously thought about moving.

You know what it's like? I don't think you do, brother. I don't think you've got the slightest idea.

You have to find your kid lying in the weeds of a vacant lot that way before you'd really know. You have to kneel beside him and break down and bawl and not give a damn who sees you. You have to pick

him up, trying to be gentle, and hear him crying, "Daddy. . . Daddy —"

Then maybe you'd know . . . maybe. . . .

Cody was back at the car, calling for an ambulance. I held Tommy, whispering to him. "Who hurt you, son? Who hurt you . . . ?"

His voice was so faint that I had to bend close to his lips to make out his answer. "Booby," he whispered, sobbing weakly. "Booby hurt me. He gave me candy . . . then he — he hurt me . . . Daddy. . . ."

It was a thing I should have told Lieutenant Cody when he came back from the car. But something locked the information inside me. Something ugly and violent that was beginning to grow in me.

The ambulance came and we rushed Tommy to the hospital. They sent a police car after Nancy; I knew she'd want to be with the boy. We waited while the doctors gave Tommy emergency treatment. They came out with grim faces and told us that his condition was very serious, that all we could do now was wait and hope and maybe pray a little.

Lieutenant Cody came by the hospital. He told me that they had picked up one of the suspects, Aleck Spiegel for questioning and they were trying to locate the other one, George LaRosa.

I could have saved him a lot of trouble. Because I knew who had done this to Tommy. But it was something I kept inside myself, hugging the knowledge to me. I

wanted to get to him before the police did. . . .

I left Nancy at the hospital, sitting at Tommy's bedside. I told her I would call her shortly. Then I drove the car home and went to my room and pulled my bureau drawer open. Under some shirts, I found the old Luger I had brought back as a war souvenir. It is a big, ugly gun.

I put the gun in my coat pocket. It made a heavy bulge and made the coat hang all crooked. I went out and walked down the block. I didn't have to go very far. Just half way down the next block. Then I turned into a gravel drive, crossed a lawn and went up on a porch. It was dark on the porch. Climbing roses and bougainvillea cut off the rays from a street light.

I knocked on the door. I could hear somebody stirring around in the house. In a moment, the door opened. A young, dark-haired woman looked out. "Oh," she said. "Mr. Allen."

"Hello, Alice," I said softly. "Mind if I come in for a minute?"

"Well — I — it's late. I'm not dressed. . . ."

I shoved the door open and went in. She moved back from me, her eyes stained black and her face pale.

She was a good-looking, petite brunette in her late twenties. She was a registered nurse and she lived alone in this house with her younger brother. Her reputation wasn't too good around the neighborhood because she came home tight some

nights with a date who was seen to leave early in the morning. You couldn't do things like that very discreetly in this neighborhood.

Her younger brother was in his early twenties, a gangling, pimple-faced kid who didn't work and didn't go to school. Sometimes one of the families in the neighborhood hired him to babysit. I'd had him babysit with Tommy a time or two when Nancy and I had to go somewhere.

He had red hair and went by the nickname of Booby. . . .

"I want to see Booby, Alice," I said, in a very calm voice.

"Oh." The tip of her pink tongue darted out and touched her lips. "He isn't here tonight, Joe. He's spending the night downtown with some friend of his. I — I forgot who he said it was."

I had been moving slowly across the floor and she had been backing away from me. She was wearing a white chenille dressing robe. The throat was open, plunging down to the looped knot that held it together at the waist. It seemed doubtful she was wearing anything under it.

I suddenly shoved her out of the way and strode through the house. She was on my heels, dragging at my coat and yelling.

But I kept going and I kicked the bedroom door open, and he was sitting on the edge of the bed, an ugly kid with an acne-pitted face the color of a grubworm.

He stood up, shakily. His scared

blue eyes stared at me through thick, silver-rimmed glasses. His bottom lip was trembling and dribbling spittle.

"You rotten little devil," I whispered. I went up to him and took the Luger out.

Alice was screaming and dragging at my arm. I turned and jabbed the gun in her direction. She drew back and huddled against a wall, her face like chalk.

Booby was shivering and gagging. "I didn't mean to hurt Tommy," he babbled. "Honest, Mr. Allen. We were just playing. I didn't mean to hurt him —"

"Shut up, you fool!" Alice screamed at him. "He can't prove anything."

I walked across the room to the telephone, picked it up in one hand and dialed the hospital number. My other hand was busy with the Luger which I kept pointed at the kid's middle.

"I want to speak with Mrs. Nancy Perry," I said, when they answered. "You'll find her on the fourth floor in room 478."

Then we waited for Nancy to come to the phone.

The room was still, except for the whimpering sounds coming from Booby.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" I said to him, softly. "I'm going to put a hole through you if Tommy dies. You'd better pray he's all right. Because I'll sure as hell put a hole through you if he dies."

He stood there with his frightened eyes darting around as he breathed hoarsely. I looked at his freckled hands with their broken, dirty nails. I thought about what Tommy had gone through under those hands.

It was very still, while we waited.
Then I heard Nancy's voice.

"Nancy, this is Joe. How is he? What?"

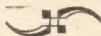
I listened to her voice.

Something inside me turned old and withered and lifeless.

I held the pistol and looked at Booby.

You know what I did then?

I pulled the trigger.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

JAMES T. FARRELL, the famed author of the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, a trio of constant best-sellers in many editions, makes his debut in *Manhunt* this month with the photographic and penetrating *The Old Flame*. Born on Chicago's South Side, he made the region around 63rd Street and Stony Island Avenue famous in his novels. Farrell is a shy and unassuming man who has lived in



Chicago, Paris, and at present in New York. He started writing while a student at the University of Chicago, and has been gaining critical and popular acclaim ever since—an acclaim that has grown with the publication of his new novel, *The Face of Time*.

RICHARD DEMING is the creator of Manville Moon, a detective who's been popular both with *Manhunt* readers and with the many perusers of his novels, *The Gallows In My Garden* and *Tweak The Devil's Nose*. Deming does voluminous research in working out every one of his stories, and the resulting accurate picture of police work is a dividend for the reader. His current *The Blonde*



In The Bar is Manville-Moon-less, but gives you instead a fine portrait of an "honest" cop.

JACK WEBB'S first novel was *The Big Sin*, featuring Detective-Sergeant Sammy Golden and the Catholic priest Father Shanley, a pair that gained instant approval among readers and critics. Another novel quickly followed (*The Naked Angel*) and readers will be happy to know that not only is Webb now preparing a third, but that Shanley and Golden will soon be appearing in a series of MGM movies. Webb is no relation, incidentally, to the Jack Webb who directs and stars in *Dragnet*. *Broken Doll*, which represents his first appearance in *Manhunt*, is an unusual story that shows Webb's tough and perceptive writing at its best.



FRANK KANE'S Johnny Liddell has found himself in some strange situations, but we'll bet there have been none more unusual than the one described in this month's *Lead Ache*. Kane has a fondness for punning titles, incidentally, as witness his current *Poisons Unknown*, or some of his other Liddell novels: *Bare Trap*, *Bullet Proof* and *Slay Ride*. In spite of this leaning (or possibly because of it) his novels and stories have been among the most popular on the stands.



SAM S. TAYLOR apologized for the long delay between *Manhunt* stories by saying he'd been working on some TV shows. Wonder if *A Clear Picture* really happened at some California television studio? ♦ EVAN HUNTER's . . . *Or Leave It Alone* departs from his well-known Matt Cordell yarns to describe the fate of a dope addict who thought he could do without the stuff. Hunter's now at work on a novel about Cordell, incidentally. ♦ CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. has written several fine yarns for *Manhunt*, but we think his current *You Know What I Did?* is easily the best. It's a grim and realistic story that might have been taken out of today's headlines. ♦ FRED L. ANDERSON is a researcher by profession, who came up with a lot of odd and interesting facts about *Footprints* which we thought might startle a few *Manhunt* readers. We're hoping for more of Anderson's work soon.

IN THIS ISSUE:

CRASH

JAMES T. FARRELL, author of *Studs Lonigan*, makes his debut in *Manhunt* with *The Old Flame*, the realistic story of a man who was afraid for no reason, and a woman who didn't seem to be afraid of anything at all. FRANK KANE'S Johnny Liddell returns in a story about a reporter, who was killed for what seemed to be no motive whatever, and a big-time dance-hall owner, in *Lead Ache*, and . . . *Or Leave It Alone* is EVAN HUNTER'S portrayal of a dope addict who said he didn't really need the stuff, until he suddenly had to do without it.

COPS

RICHARD DEMING portrays a cop tempted to accept a very lovely bribe for what looked like absolutely nothing, in *The Blonde In The Bar*, and JACK WEBB'S *Broken Doll* is the story of a new branch of the police force — the Airport Detail — and a simple murder.

COOL

The Right One, by JONATHAN CRAIG, shows a woman with only one thing to live for, and the man who gave it to her. CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. poses a question with a single brutal answer, in *You Know What I Did?*

CASH

FLETCHER FLORA turns in another one of his realistic and shocking stories, *Murder Of A Mouse*, which deals with the perfect murder — which, unfortunately, included an imperfect victim. R. VAN TAYLOR'S *The Woman on the Bus* is the story of a woman who was obviously in hiding, and a man who had nothing to hide.

CROP

A bumper crop of stories, plus our regular features: VINCENT H. GADDIS' *Crime Cavalcade*, *Portrait Of A Killer* by DAN SONTUP, *The Murder Market* by H. H. HOLMES, and our special fact feature, *Footprints* by FRED L. ANDERSON — all combine to make a mammoth mountain of grade-A material for May!